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SPIRITUALITY

LITURGICAL SPIRITUALITY OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

THE RITE OF TRISAGION IN THE SYRO-MALABAR LITURGY

Dr. Joseph Roby Alencherry

MAR EPHREM: MARTYR AND SINGER OF THE WORD

Monk Lorenzo

CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

Explanations and Interpretations in the Light of Lumen Gentium

Dr. Thomas Puthukulangara

News

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Editorial

The Christian Spirituality or the human journey into the mystery of Triune God is possible only in and through the incarnate Son of God. We encounter and experience God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is faith in Jesus that opens the doors of God experience to us. This faith has a communitarian character, i.e., the believers in Jesus necessarily form part of the *ecclesia* around an Apostle. The Christian Spirituality is basically ecclesial. Only in the context of faith lived in a particular or individual Church is there room for genuine God experience. And liturgy is the ecclesial celebration of the faith in Jesus Christ of an individual Church. Therefore, the liturgy of one's own Church *sui iuris* is the proper *locus* of experiencing God.

The first article in this issue of *Christian Orient* deals with the "Liturgical Spirituality of the Syro Malabar Church". Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI convincingly proves that each Christian has right and duty to lead a life based on the liturgy of one's own individual Church tradition. He concludes suggesting that all devotions are to be re-oriented according to the spirit of the liturgical seasons. Spirituality should be in tune with the genius of ones own Church *sui iuris*.

The second article by Joseph Alencherry treats of the 'thrice holy' hymn sung before the Scriptural reading in the Holy Qurbana and the Divine Praises. The

deacon who proclaims, "Lift up your voices and glorify the living God, O all people" is in the place of heavenly beings who continually praise God inviting us to join them. He concludes stating: "Trisagion is a heavenly catechesis for men, teaching us on the divine relation to the cosmos. In short, heaven and earth join in one accord to praise their Creator in Trisagion".

In the third article, "Mar Ephrem: Martyr and Singer of the Word", Monk Lorenzo traces Ephrem's relationship with the Logos – the hidden Word of the Sacred Scriptures which is its tabernacle. According to Lorenzo, Ephrem is truly a martyr and singer of the glory of the Logos; a martyr who like John the Baptist, longs to diminish so that the Verb of the Father may increase in us, the Bride".

The final entry in this issue is the first part of a rather long article on "Catholicity of the Church" by Thomas Puthukulangara (the second part will appear in the next issue of *Christian Orient*). Basing himself on the missionary command of the risen Lord in Mat 28,18-20 he beautifully exposes how the principle of catholicity regulating the internal life of the Church holds everyone and everything in communion. The second part will elaborate the theology of the catholicity in *Lumen Gentium* with its Trinitarian foundation. Sincere thanks to all the contributors to this issue.

Dr Andrews Mekkattukunnel

Liturgical Spirituality of the Syro-Malabar Church

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

1. Introduction

The Syro-Malabar Church in India has its origin from the evangelizing ministry of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India. It developed itself in the cultural context of India and in close contact with the East Syrian Church. Thus it grew into a Church that was "Hindu in culture, Christian in religion and Oriental in worship."¹ Mar Andrews Thazhath explains four characteristics to express the identity of the Syro-Malabar Church, "Apostolic, Catholic, Oriental and Indian."² This Church had members in many parts of India, and its ecclesial head was known as the "Metropolitan of All India."

During the western colonialism, the Syro-Malabar identity and heritage which the St. Thomas Christians used to call "Way of Thomas" (*Thomayude Margam*) was disfigured by the Latin elements such as theological, spiritual, liturgical, juridical, administrative and disciplinary. The

implementation of the finally approved text of the Eucharistic celebration that was approved in December 19, 1985 helped the revival of the liturgical spirituality, for genuine liturgy is a must for living a genuine spirituality. Each Christian has the right and duty to lead a life based on the liturgy of one's own Church. Christian spirituality is basically and essentially liturgical. This article is an attempt to explore the liturgical spirituality of the Syro-Malabar Church.

2. Spirituality

Spirituality is a life of Christian perfection. It is a state of being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect or being holy as He is holy. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). It is living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord's words, "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). To phrase differently, spirituality is growth

¹ Placid J. Podipara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 8, 1959, 89-104.

² Andrews Thazhath, *The Quest for Identity: The Syro-Malabar Church and Its Rite*, Thrissur: Thrissur Institute of Theology, 1992, 6.

in Jesus Christ or divinization.³ Very often spirituality is understood as a special trend of Christian sanctification, ministry and work.⁴ For example Carmelite spirituality, Franciscan spirituality, Ignatian spirituality etc. We can speak of a Pauline spirituality where Paul invites to lead a life “worthy of our calling” (Eph 4:1) and a Johannine spirituality with the mystical view of God made flesh and union of humans with Christ as expressed in the vine and the branches (Jn 15:4), bread of life (Jn 6:51) etc. Whether we speak of spirituality associated with persons, societies and religions it is a human journey into the mystery of God and the mystery of human life transformed into the divine.⁵ It is a style of God experience.⁶

3. Christian Spirituality

The particular style of God experience of Christians is called Christian spirituality.⁷ It is a style of experiencing God in Jesus Christ, *Ammannu-El*, God with us. Jesus

revealed that he is the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father but through him (Jn 14:6). Thus in Jesus, we have a concrete and personal experience of God. So Christian spirituality is the experience of God in and through Jesus. It is the ‘life in Christ’, ‘life with Christ’, and ‘life for Christ’. Christian Spirituality is the life of the ‘sons’ in the ‘Son’.⁸ The real encounter of God and humans takes place in Jesus Christ, for “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1: 1-2). So the perfect experience of Jesus is the fullness of Christian spirituality.

Christian spirituality is basically liturgical and ecclesial. It is living the faith that is celebrated in the liturgy of the Church. Hence the knowledge of one’s ecclesial and liturgical identity is necessary for a proper spiritual life and formation.

³Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 1995, 34.

⁴ Patros Yousif, “Ecclesial Spirituality,” *Christian Orient* 7, 3 (September 1986), 129; “East Syrian Spirituality: Basic Elements and orientations,” in *Oriental Churches: Theological Dimensions*, ed. Xavier Koodapuzha, 112-153, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1988, 112.

⁵ Peter E Fink, “Liturgy and Spirituality: A Timely Intersection,” in *Liturgy and Spirituality in Context: Perspectives on prayer and Culture*, ed. Eleanor Bernstein, 47-61, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990, 50.

⁶ Varghese Pathikulangara, “Liturgical Spirituality,” Editorial, *Christian Orient* 10, 3 (September 1989), 93; “Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians,” *The Harp* 21, (2006), 104; *Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy: Introduction to the Liturgy*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 2005, 49.

⁷ Varghese Pathikulangara, “Liturgical Spirituality,” 93.

⁸ Thomas Kathanar Koonammakkel, “The Spiritual Vision of Varthamanappusthakam: History of an Unending Pilgrimage from the Desert into the Sea,” *Christian Orient* 10, 3 (September 1989), 101.

Church is the continuation of Jesus Christ. He has assured his continuous presence till the end of the age (Mt 28:20). "It is in the Church that Jesus Christ is proclaimed, celebrated, experienced and believed here and now. The authentic Christ experience, therefore, is ecclesial experience."⁹

4. Liturgy: The Blueprint of Ecclesial Life

Liturgy as a living reality constitutes the Church. It is in the liturgy, a community becomes the Church of God or Christ. Liturgy is the blue-print of the life of the Church. Just as a blue-print gives the detailed plan of the construction of a building through signs and symbols, the liturgy of an individual Church manifests her life in Christ in minute detail.¹⁰ Therefore constant and continuous catechesis is essential for an authentic liturgical and ecclesial life. Liturgy is essentially a communitarian reality. "Its aim is to worship the Lord in order to sanctify the community formed of individual persons called in their intimacy to follow Christ. Communitarian because liturgy is

ordered by the hierarchy and lived by the community and executed by them."¹¹

Liturgy is understood only in relation to the Church, for it is the manifestation of the real nature of the Church¹². Church explains liturgy only in terms of the mystery of Christ. "It is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church."¹³

5. Liturgy: The Source and Centre of Spirituality

The Spirituality of a Church is centred on the authentic and proper celebration of the Eucharist liturgy. The celebration of the "Mysteries" (Sacraments and Sacramentals) and the "Divine Praises" (Liturgy of the Hours) contribute to the spirituality of a Church.¹⁴ Spirituality, personal prayer and prayer of the Church are to be seen as one entity, for they are not opposed to each other. The whole ecclesial life is to be filled with and motivated by the spirit of liturgy.¹⁵ Thus

⁹ Varghese Pathikulangara, "Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 106; *Liturgy-Experience*, 37-38.

¹⁰ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, 23; *Qurbana*, 5-6.

¹¹ Patros Yousif, "East Syrian Spirituality," 114.

¹² Thomas Poovathanikunnel, "Note for a Christian Spirituality," *Malabar Theological Review* 6, 1 (2011), 78.

¹³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

¹⁴ Varghese Pathikulangara, *A Moment with Jesus*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 2008, 9.

¹⁵ Thomas Mannooramparambil, "Rev. Fr. Placid J. Podipara and the Syro-Malabar Liturgy," *Christian Orient* 7, 2 (March-June 1986), 53-54.

we can say that spiritual life is nothing but the life of a person guided by the celebration of the liturgy.¹⁶ Hence the liturgy should be restored for an authentic and genuine spirituality. The Council Fathers propose a return to the authentic sources of all tradition for an organic growth:

All members of the Eastern Churches should be firmly convinced that they can and ought always preserve their legitimate liturgical rites and established ways of life, and that changes are to be introduced only to forward their own organic development. They themselves are to carry out all these prescriptions with the greatest fidelity. They are to aim always at a more perfect knowledge and practice of their rites, and if they have fallen away due to circumstances of times and persons, they are to strive to return to their ancestral traditions.¹⁷

6. Liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church

Sharing the Christ experience of St. Thomas the Apostle, Syro-Malabar Church grew up in a unique style up to the sixteenth century. There was an organic growth of this Church until it was forced to make changes in the life style by the Portuguese missionaries.

St. Thomas Christians have a magnificent system of 'Liturgical Cycle.' The Eucharistic celebration, Sacraments, Sacramentals and the Liturgy of the Hours are systematically arranged according to the liturgical year so that the faithful are brought to the supreme experience of God in Jesus Christ, the authentic Thomas Christian Spirituality. This is achieved through the authentic liturgy: a life through signs and symbols.

6.1. Life through Signs and Symbols

The Christ-experience awakened in the community through the witnessing of the apostles is brought to effect today to the present generation in the liturgy through signs and symbols. "Symbols in liturgy unite the believers with non-perceptible divine realities."¹⁸ Thus the role of symbolism is at the root of Christian celebration as the whole Mystery of Salvation is re-enacted through the effective signs and symbols.¹⁹ It is rhythmically repeated in its own time in the community of the people of God that it becomes an intense experience of the historical fact. The re-enactment of the salvific actions through the signs and symbols is essential for the growth and maturity in faith life. This re-enactment is done through the Holy

¹⁶ Thomas Poovathanikunnel, "Note for a Christian Spirituality," 79.

¹⁷ *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6.

¹⁸ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 54.

¹⁹ Varghese Pathikulangara, "Eucharist: *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinosum*," in *The Mystery of the Eucharist: Essays on the Occasion of the Eucharistic Year*, eds. Sebastian Athappilly and Paulachan Kochappilly, 71-91, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2006, 86-87.

Qurbana, Mysteries (Sacraments), Divine Praises, Liturgical Year and the unique tradition and practices of an individual Church.

6.2. Holy *Qurbana*

The Holy *Qurbana* is the centre of all the activities of a Church, for all the activities draw vitality from it. It is the supreme act of the Church and the core of the spirituality of the faithful. It is the act through which God sanctifies the world in Christ, and humans render worship to God the Father through Christ.²⁰ Through signs and symbols, the Holy *Qurbana* proclaims and celebrates the redemptive history realized in Christ.

It is also the summary of the whole liturgical year. It summarizes and proclaims the whole history of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ. The Syro-Malabar Holy *Qurbana* begins with the Angel's hymn (Lk 2:14) which symbolizes the incarnation of the Lord. Here, the concrete and personal entry of God in the human history to accomplish the human salvation is remembered. Then the community is led to the Old/First Testament background of the incarnation and the hidden life Jesus.²¹

Liturgy of the Word is the celebration of the public life of Jesus and Rite of Preparation is the celebration of the passion, death and burial of Jesus. Whatever is celebrated in the *Quddasha* (Central part of the *Qurbana*) is proleptically proclaimed in the Rite of Preparation. His death and resurrection is celebrated during the *Quddasha* and the decisive action of the Holy Spirit is proclaimed through the rite of Epiclesis. Holy Spirit transforms and sanctifies the mysteries in the Holy *Qurbana*. In the Rite of Reconciliation, the reconciliation of humankind takes place with the heavenly Father by the working of the Holy Spirit. During the Rite of Communion the faithful are united to the risen Lord and become the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.²² Poovathanikunnel explains, "Syro-Malabar *Qurbana* is the celebration of life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Spirituality is nothing but the life of a Christian according to the mystery of Christ. Eucharistic celebration enables us to experience by being with this mystery of Christ and it transforms his life to live what he celebrates."²³

²⁰ Thomas Mannorampampil, "The Restoration of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana*," *Christian Orient* 8, 1 (March 1987), 6.

²¹ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Resurrection, Life and Renewal: A Theological Study of the Liturgical Celebrations of the Great Saturday and the Sunday of Resurrection in the Chaldeo-Indian Church*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1982, 54.

²² Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 91-92.

²³ Thomas Poovathanikunnel, "Note for a Christian Spirituality," 82.

6.3. Mysteries (Sacraments)

The Mysteries (Sacraments) are celebrations during the decisive moments in the life of a faithful. They reveal the sacramental nature of the Church. The first three mysteries, namely, Baptism, Sacrament of Perfection and Holy *Qurbana* initiate one to Christian existence. So they are called Sacraments of Initiation. When one is initiated to Christian life through the Sacraments of Initiation he or she is signed and set apart by the sign of the cross. In all the Eastern Churches these three sacraments are given in immediate succession. "Characteristic of Eastern understanding and practice of baptism throughout history is the unitive aspect of the sacrament. The rites of initiation, comprising baptism, Chrismation, (or confirmation, as it was later called in the West) and Eucharist are seen as one continuous action."²⁴ The Syro-Malabar Church also followed the East Syrian tradition till the Synod of Diamper and it was restored on January 1, 2005.²⁵

The Easterners use the passive voice²⁶ of the baptismal formula to signify that the

authority comes from God. St. Thomas Christians understand the Sacrament of Perfection as the one that completes the liturgical action of the Baptism and perfects the identity of the person by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The growth in faith ought to begin from the moment of birth in faith by the reception of Baptism and Perfection. Hence Holy *Qurbana*, the Sacrament of Growth also is given to the baptized even if the candidate is a child. The sacraments of initiation introduce and help the faithful to make progress in the life of faith.

The sacrament of Reconciliation marks the return of the lost and gives the experience of the mercy of Christ. Sacrament of Priesthood is the proclamation of one's readiness to minister to the Church. Priests are for the service of the Church to realize her mission. Their work is to feed, sanctify and lead the flock of Christ to his fold. Different steps of this sacrament are *Qaroya*, *Heupadiakona*, *M'sm-sana*, *Qasisa*, and *Appesqopa*. The sacrament of Marriage which is the consecration of human love and

²⁴ Paul Meyendorff, "Liturgy and Spirituality" in *Christina Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff and Jean Leclercq, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988, 351.

²⁵ Commission for Liturgy, *Syro Malabar Sabhayude Qudashakal*, Kakkanad: Secretariat, Commission for Liturgy, 2005.

²⁶ Jacob Vellian, *Kudashakalude Prathikatmakatwam*, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1977, 51.

²⁷ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Mar Thomma Margam: A New Catechism for the St. Thomas Christians of India*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 2004, 134. The Second Sacrament is known as Confirmation in the Latin Tradition, Chrismation in Byzantine Tradition and Sacrament of Perfection in Syriac Churches.

commitment between a man and woman is for building up the community of faithful. The Anointing of the sick proclaims the heavenly oriented or eschatological nature of Christian faith. This mystery gives an eschatological answer to the sufferings.²⁸ Thus each mystery (sacrament) is a proclamation of Christ-event through signs and symbols.

6.4. Divine Praises

The Divine praises (Liturgy of the Hours) is the extension of the life of Holy *Qurbana* to the other hours of the day. It is the proclamation of faith in detail according to the various hours, days, weeks and seasons of the liturgical year.²⁹ The Divine praises makes the Christian life a continuous experience of salvation. Together with the Holy *Qurbana*, it really moulds the authentic ecclesial spirituality of the Church.

The Divine Praises of an individual Church nourishes its particular spirituality. It also fosters the liturgical spirituality as it contains prayers and hymns that elicit sentiments and thoughts proper to each Season of the liturgical year and narrate the mysteries that are commemorated. They

bring to mind some particular mysteries of faith and awaken in us the spirit of the Season.³⁰

It is the official prayer of the Church. Therefore it far excels private prayers and personal devotions. It has always been the official prayer of the Church for all Eastern traditions. When one celebrates the Divine Praises, one grows in the Christian identity proper to that ecclesial tradition.³¹ The faithful of the Oriental Churches take part in the Divine Praises. St. Thomas Christians had regular and orderly celebration of the Divine Praises in all parish churches and it was an invariable part of their family prayer.

6.5. Liturgical Year

The mystery of salvation is fully re-enacted in every Eucharistic celebration. When a community takes part in this divine action, it has to realize its own salvation through the salvific acts of Christ. But as humans are not capable to grasp and realize the fullness of the Mystery of Christ in just a celebration, each individual Church re-enacts and celebrates the Christ-event within the limit of a year. This is called the liturgical year. This arrangement is "to

²⁸ Thomas Poovathanikunnel, "Note for a Christian Spirituality," 83-84.

²⁹ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 118; Abraham Mattam, *Forgotten East: Mission, Liturgy and Spirituality of the Eastern Churches*, Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2001, 180.

³⁰ Abraham Mattam, *Forgotten East: Mission, Liturgy and Spirituality of the Eastern Churches*, 181.

³¹ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Divine Praises and Liturgical Year*, Kottayam: Denha services, 2000, 13-14.

concentrate on one at a time and thus gradually to celebrate and realize the whole Mystery of Salvation in the cycle of a year.”³²

The Syro-Malabar Church follows the East Syriac tradition of the history of salvation which begins with Nativity-Epiphany celebration and reaches the climax in the Dedication of the Church. The liturgical year of this Church is divided into nine seasons having seven weeks each in principle but with necessary adjustments. The nine liturgical periods of the Syro-Malabar Church are arranged according to the unfolding of the Mystery of salvation in its relation to history.³³ The Syro-Malabar Church has a well arranged liturgical cycle. Aerthayil points out:

The Liturgy is the reproduction and actualization of the whole mystery of Christ in time. Finite as we are, it is psychologically impossible for us to grasp and assimilate the entire mystery of Christ at one stroke in one day. The Church, therefore, uses the pedagogical technique of communicating it little by little, over a year's time, according to a wisely contrived cycle so that ultimately we contemplate the whole of God's plan for our salvation which was realized in His Son. The different seasons of this cycle or liturgical year present to us the various aspects of the mystery of Christ, thus facilitating our

understanding of the whole mystery. The liturgical calendar which St. Thomas Christians used, had been divided in such a way that it not only presented the whole mystery of Christ over a year's time, but also prepared them physically and psychologically for the assimilation of the same by a life of penance and spiritual preparation.³⁴

The liturgical year of the Syro-Malabar Church begins with the season of Annunciation. It is the proclamation and celebration of the encounter between God and humans in Jesus Christ. The season of *Denha*, provides the faithful an occasion for meditating on the Trinitarian economy of human salvation. During this period Holy Trinity is proclaimed and celebrated in a special way. During the season of Great Fast the faithful reflect and meditate over the public life of Jesus, especially his passion, death and burial. This is a time of total conversion. The Church celebrates Jesus' victory over death, sin, suffering and satan during the season of Resurrection. The empty tomb, the empty cross, fruit bearing tree are the images of the unique victory of Jesus. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles marks the beginning of season of the Apostles. During this period, the Church meditates on the work of the Holy Spirit in humanity, sanctifying, transforming and elevating it to the heights

³² Varghese Pathikulangara, *Divine Praises and Liturgical Year*, 128.

³³ Varghese Pathikulangara, *A Moment with Jesus*, 10.

³⁴ James Aerthayil, *The Spirituality of the St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001, 173.

of divinity. The maturity and fruitfulness of the Church are meditated during *Qaita*. It is the time of plentiful harvest for the Church. The fruits of the Church are those of holiness and martyrdom. The great solemnity of the Glorious Cross on September 14th is the basic theme of the liturgical period *Eliab Sliba*. During this period the faithful try to have an experience of the heavenly bliss here on earth itself. The faithful meditate on the end of time and the last judgment in the season of Moses. The believers are called to make an examination of their life here on earth and repent on all the failures. The last four weeks of the liturgical year known as the season of the Dedication of the Church are precisely arranged to have an in depth heavenly experience for the faithful. Christ, the Bridegroom leads the Church, His bride to the heavenly bridal chamber and offers her to the Father giving her the fullness of heavenly bliss.³⁵ When the faithful adapt their life and piety to this arrangement of the liturgical year, their life become truly liturgical and ecclesial. They reach the climax of such experience during the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*, the full and integral expression of their faith and life.

6.6. Veneration of the *Evangelion*

St. Thomas Christians have great devotion to the *Evangelion* or the Gospel Lectionary, for it is the symbol of Jesus Christ. It is kept on the right side of the altar symbolizing Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father. During the Holy *Qurbana* there is the procession of the Gospel Lectionary from the *madbha* to the *bema* with the accompaniment of the Cross, two lighted candles and the thurible. During this procession, the archdeacon holds it raised to his forehead as to cover his face. It symbolizes the descent of Jesus, seated at the right hand of God, the Father to the midst of the people.³⁶

6.7. Veneration of the Cross

On important occasions and the festivals along with the Gospel lectionary, the Cross also is carried in procession. St. Thomas Christians use the cross known as St. Thomas Cross. They did not use any other images except the St. Thomas Cross in their churches. St Thomas Cross symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus. The four tips of the Cross like blooming buds is a symbol of new life through the resurrection of Jesus. The descending dove is yet another symbol of resurrection. The cross erected on lotus is a living symbol of

³⁵ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 87-91; *Mar Thomma Margam*, 49-103; *A Moment with Jesus*, 27-137.

³⁶ Geo Thadikkatt, *Liturgical Identity of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Kottayam: OIRSI, 2004, 210.

faith in the risen Christ established in India. The three steps signify both heaven and Calvary.³⁷ The three steps together with the lotus symbolize the created world and hence it points to the Creator, God the Father. Hence, St Thomas Cross is a unique symbol which symbolizes The Trinity, The Holy Spirit and the Resurrected Jesus. As a symbol of the Holy Spirit it is kept on the left side of the Altar. The St Thomas Cross placed at the Eastern Wall of the Church in the *madbha* symbolizes the Christ glorified through the Resurrection and at the same time the Triune God in Heaven.

In the most solemn celebration of the Holy *Qurbana (Raza)*, the anthem of the sanctuary extols the glory of the Cross. "The Cross that has been the cause of our good and by which our mortal humanity was set free, be for us, O My lord, a strong fortress, and by this Cross, we shall overcome the wicked one and all his devices."³⁸ The devotion to the Cross is seen also in the practice of processions going round the Cross erected in the churchyard, and erecting shrines in honour of the Cross on the way-sides. They celebrate the feast

of the miracle of St. Thomas Cross on December 18. St. Thomas Christians used to pour oil, light candles, set flowers and burn incense before the cross as a sign of respect and adoration.³⁹

6.8. Feasts

St. Thomas Christians celebrate the feasts of their liturgical cycle very solemnly. Their important feasts are those that related to the Christ-event and human salvation, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, Transfiguration, and Exaltation of the Cross. Then the feasts of Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Thomas, the apostle are also solemnly celebrated. *Dukrana*, the death anniversary of St. Thomas the Apostle is celebrated on July 3. The feast celebrations also include the feast of the patron saint of a community.

The local cultural systems were used for the celebrations. "The externals such as flag-hoisting, decorations, processions are all conducted according to the local cultural systems, while the internals, i.e., liturgical celebrations, are performed exactly according to the basic ecclesial system."⁴⁰ The celebrations of *Denha*, the feast of the

³⁷ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Mar Thomma Margam*, 10-13; Geo Thadikkatt, "The Cross in Different Ecclesial Traditions," in *The Folly of the Cross: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Varghese Pathikulangara*, CMI, ed. Paulachan Kochappilly, 263-279, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, 268-271; Kuriakose Moonjeli, *Maharahasyam Aradhanavalsarathil*, Kanjirapally: Vimala Books, 2008, 71-74.

³⁸ *Raza*, 13.

³⁹ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 122; Mathew Anikuzhikattil, "Distinctive Traits of Eastern Liturgies," *Christian Orient* 25, 2 (June 2005), 63.

⁴⁰ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, 62.

Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan is an example. Though the liturgical celebration is the same for all the St. Thomas Christians, the external form of celebration vary from the northern region from southern region of Kerala. In north it is known as *Pindipperunal* which stresses Jesus as the light of the world and life of all whereas in the south it is *Rakkulipperunal* which stresses the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

6.9. Fasts

St. Thomas Christians had fasting as the most important form of penance and they considered it as the greatest means of God-experience. They followed the rhythm of the liturgical cycle in fasting. Sunday, being the day of Lord's resurrection, it is considered as a non-fasting day throughout the year.⁴¹ Pathikulangara describes the main fasting days:

1. Twenty five day fast in preparation for the Nativity of Jesus.
2. Three day fast observed eighteen days before commencing fifty day fast.
3. Fifty day fast in preparation for Resurrection.
4. Fifteen day fast in preparation for the Assumption of Mother Mary.
5. Eight day fast in preparation for the Nativity of Mother Mary.

6. Friday fast in remembrance of our Lord's death on the cross and the life of the Church.

7. Wednesday fast in honour of Mother Mary.⁴²

Fasting lasted till sunset, when the only meal of the day was taken. On the days of fasting they abstained from meat, fish, egg, milk and milk products, coffee, wine, and betel leaves, and even from conjugal rights during the whole of lent.⁴³ During the fasting days St. Thomas Christians used to spend more time in prayer either through liturgical celebrations or through personal and common devotional activities. The time of fasting was a time of prayer and reception of sacraments. The other important aspects of their fasting are renunciation and almsgiving. Thus there is a beautiful blending of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of their Christian commitment.⁴⁴

6.10. Family Prayer

St. Thomas Christians have the most impressive devotional practice of family prayer in which all the members come together at a fixed time in the morning and evening under the leadership of the father of the family. The liturgy of the hours was the most important part of the family prayer. The rosary devotion became

⁴¹ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 124.

⁴² Varghese Pathikulangara, *Mar Thomma Margam*, 141.

⁴³ James Aerthayil, *The Spirituality of the St. Thomas Christians*, 168.

⁴⁴ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, 65.

popular and substituted the liturgy of the hours due to the influence of the missionaries in the sixteenth century.⁴⁵ Bible reading is also an integral part of the family prayer. They used to follow the liturgical calendar for the Bible reading.

6.11. Pilgrimages

The Second Vatican Council explains the Church as a pilgrim community marching towards the Heavenly Jerusalem. Pathikulangara states the pilgrim nature of the Syro-Malabar Church in their liturgy:

The pilgrim nature of their Christian existence is proclaimed by the St. Thomas Christians every day during their liturgical celebrations when they all stand under the leadership of the celebrant turned to the east or the Sanctuary or the St. Thomas Cross, the eschatological sign of salvation. The same is proclaimed during the processions both within the liturgical celebrations and those conducted in connection with festivals or funerals.⁴⁶

They also make pilgrimages to different shrines. The pilgrimage to the tomb of St Thomas at Madras and to Malayattoor where they believe the foot prints of St. Thomas their father in faith is imprinted are of great importance for them. These pilgrimages precede a period of fasting and renunciation. Due preparation

in prayer and great austerity mark their pilgrimages. Many even these days go barefoot to Malayattoor from different parts of Kerala. Thus they always lead a life fixing their eyes on heaven. "We no longer pay attention to the things that are seen, but to those that are unseen, for the things that we see last for a moments, but that which can not be seen is eternal" (2 Cor 4: 18).

6.12. Birth Rites

St. Thomas Christians observed many of the local practices in a Christian way. There are several religious ceremonies that are common to high caste Hindus and St. Thomas Christians and still they preserve and practice them as a precious heritage. There are many such ceremonies throughout the life of a person and even after the death and burial. A new born child is fed with powdered gold, honey or ghee mixed with a herb called *Vayambu* for beauty and healthy physic. Some of the other practices they observed are *Jatakarma*, the star determining, *Namakarana*, the giving of name, and *Annaprasna*, the rice giving. They always insisted the presence of priest and his prayers and blessings on all these occasions and this made the difference of a Hindu and a Christian child.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 125.

⁴⁶ Placid J. Podipara, *St. Thomas Christians*, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1970, 80; Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, 66; James Aerthayil, *The Spirituality of the St. Thomas Christians*, 43-44.

⁴⁷ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, 67.

They had Biblical names with local modifications. Instead of Thomas or Thomma they had Thommi, Thomman, Thommachan and instead of Mariam or Mary they used Mariamma, Kochumariam, Kunjumariam, Mariakutty etc. The paternal grandfather's name is given to the first male child and the paternal grandmother's name is given to the first girl child whereas the second male child and female child are named after maternal line. This practice is still prevalent among St. Thomas Christians.

There was also similarity in the ornaments of the children of St. Thomas Christians and that of Hindu brethren. Their ornaments were made of leopard's claws and mongoose teeth set in gold. The cross without the figure of Jesus, the unique symbol of the faith of St. Thomas Christians was an indispensable part of their ornaments.⁴⁸ Cross differentiated the ornaments of the Christians from that of the Hindus.

Vidyarambha or initiation of the child at the age of five into the letters of the alphabet is an important occasion of religious significance for a Brahmin. St. Thomas Christians also followed this practice but always with necessary modifications.⁴⁹ Such modifications always expressed their Christian faith handed over to them by St. Thomas, the father of their faith.

6.13. Marriage Ceremonies

The indigenous character is explicit in the marriage ceremonies of St. Thomas Christians. The ceremonial shaving of the bridegroom and the bathing during the previous night of the marriage, painting with *Mailanchi*, receiving the blessing of the teacher, the *Tali* or *Minnu*, *Adachuthura*, and many other social dimensions of the celebrations of marriage are similar to that of the Brahmins and St. Thomas Christians.⁵⁰

6.14. Death Rites

The ceremonies in connection with the death, burial and the commemoration of the dead also have an indigenous character. A dying person is assisted with prayers that the parting soul might leave the world with the remembrance of God. In the house of a dead person no food is prepared or eaten till the burial. After the burial, the priest blesses a tender coconut, drinks a little of its water and then shares it with the relatives of the dead person. It is a sign of participation in the sorrow of the family. It follows a vegetarian meal to all assembled. The priest says special prayers for the dead and blesses the house. Everybody present kisses the St. Thomas Cross and tastes the ordinary cumin seed. Almsgiving is also part of it. This ceremony is called *Nalothu*.

⁴⁸ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Liturgy-Experience*, 68.

⁴⁹ James Aerthayil, *The Spirituality of the St. Thomas Christians*, 44-45.

⁵⁰ James Aerthayil, *The Spirituality of the St. Thomas Christians*, 46-48.

According to Hindu belief all the close relatives of the dead are considered to be defiled for ten days. The ritual purification of the defilement is called *Pulakuli* (bath after defilement). It varies from region to region. In connection with this cleansing of the defilement there are special liturgical celebrations in the church and prayers at the tomb. The Holy *Qurbana* and the office for the dead are the important part of the celebrations. After the celebrations in the church the priest goes to the house and conduct special prayers. It follows a vegetarian meal. The prayers and rituals at home are similar to those of *Nalothu*.

The death anniversary is celebrated almost as a feast which is called *Chatham*. All the close relatives are invited for the same. The *Chatham* of the father of the family is observed every year and the solemnity varies from place to place. After the liturgical prayers in the church the priest conducts the special prayers and blessings at home. The vegetarian meal is served to all. The relatives and the faithful offer some money in suffrage of the departed. It is also marked by almsgiving and food to the poor.⁵¹ St. Thomas Christians have inherited special devotion to the departed souls and they pray for them. Although they follow the tradition

and spirituality of the Hindu brethren in several rituals they are very particular about the Christian significance of such practices.

6.15. Celebrations Typical of St. Thomas Christians

Besides the liturgical celebrations, and certain rites and rituals in different occasions of life, there are other celebrations very typical and unique to the St. Thomas Christians.

6.15.1. Passover Meal on Maundy Thursday

The Passover meal that is eaten in every family on Maundy Thursday night is quite unique in the whole of Christendom. *Kurisappam*,⁵² a special kind of bread with a Cross on it and a sweet drink (known as milk) are the important items of this ritual meal. After special prayers which include the reading from the Book of Exodus, the head of the family breaks the bread and distributes it to everyone starting from the eldest. Everyone eats the bread and drinks the milk with due reverence in standing position. This bread and milk are not shared with non-Christians. Now-a-days, Passover meal which is a family meal is also celebrated in the parish churches on Maundy Thursday night after the liturgical celebrations and

⁵¹ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 128; James Aerthayil, *The Spirituality of the St. Thomas Christians*, 49-50.

⁵² *Kurisappam*-Bread with a Cross. This Cross is made on the bread with the palm leaves blessed on the Palm Sunday. The mother of the house prepares it in an ambience of prayer and silence. It is also the same with the preparation of the special drink of the Passover Meal.

the Eucharistic adoration which is against the spirit of the celebration. It is a beautiful combination of the Jewish Passover meal and the Christian Eucharist in native style.⁵³

6.15.2. *Vrtas* and *Nerchas*

There are several other solemn devotional practices of *Vrtas* and *Nerchas* (Promises) for the favours received or to be received. The '*Nercha* of the twelve Apostles' is a solemn devotional practice. It includes the proper liturgical celebration in the church and a popular form of washing the feet of twelve children either in the church or at home together with sumptuous meals served to those children and the celebrating priest.

The *Nercha* of the Holy Family is another devotional practice. They call it *Muthiyuttu* (Giving meals to an old lady). They give a sumptuous meal to an old lady as *nercha*. In some areas, they give good dresses to a poor father, mother and child. St. Thomas Christians are very particular about such *Nerchas* in relation to a family celebration but such practices vary from place to place.

6.15.3. Sitting in *Bhajana*

Another popular devotion among the women folk is *Sitting in Bhajana*. It is for fortune of getting children. The devotees

spend the whole day in prayer and fasting in the churches or shrines, beginning with the morning Eucharistic celebration. The priest may give exhortations if there is good number of devotees. On such occasions the neighbours see to the daily needs of those devotees. It is very common during the eight-day fast in preparation for the nativity of Blessed Mother.

7. Liturgical Spirituality

The spirituality is liturgical based on the practice of worship. "The measuring stick of Christian spirituality is our closeness to God, and it is this closeness that is guaranteed in the liturgy."⁵⁴ The formation of each Christian has to take place on the basis of the liturgy. Training is essential to follow the liturgy meaningfully and in a way that it would influence one's whole life. Vellian says that liturgical spirituality is an expression of the living and praying Church. Therefore the liturgical spirituality is basic and authentic and it is the spirituality of the Church.⁵⁵ It is when people are not in touch with the authentic spirit of the liturgy the devotions develop.⁵⁶ The Second Vatican Council teaches:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded

⁵³ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 128.

⁵⁴ Joseph Kallarangatt, "Liturgical foundations of Theology and Ecclesiology," *Christian Orient* 24, 1 (March 2003), 8.

⁵⁵ Jacob Vellian, *Selected Studies*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2006, 445.

⁵⁶ Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955, 248.

by the very nature of the liturgy and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1Pet 2:9) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.⁵⁷

Holy *Qurbana* is a mystery that is celebrated through signs and symbols. Mystery is important only to one who can really understand and appreciates its meaning. "The Church carries on the work of spiritual formation of her children primarily when she gathers them for public worship."⁵⁸ What happens in the liturgy has to be continued in the everyday life of the faithful. "On coming out of the church, the Christian has only to assimilate and exemplify in his deeds what has been heard in the liturgical assembly and what has been done in the sacraments."⁵⁹ So the life and spirituality of a Christian is based on the liturgy of one's own Church in which one participates. That is why the Church's spirituality is called liturgical spirituality. "Holy Eucharist, the Mysteries (Sacraments and Sacramentals) and the Divine Praises or the Liturgy of the Hours celebrated

according to the rhythm, the spirit and order of the proper liturgical year, is the way offered in Catholic Church for personal transfiguration to Jesus Christ."⁶⁰ All other devotions are to be modified according to the ecclesial heritage proper to one's own Church. This is the way to nurture the liturgical spirituality of the Church. The Second Vatican Council stresses the urgent need of a spirituality based on the authentic Liturgical Year proper to each Church and invites to work for the same in case of aberrations. "For Oriental Churches, the liturgical piety is the popular piety, not something else extra-liturgical."⁶¹ The Syro-Malabar Church inherits a well-arranged liturgical cycle where the needed popular and personal devotions could be incorporated.

In the Liturgy each Christian is enabled to grow in the personal knowledge and experience of Christ. Spirituality based on the mother Church, her spiritual experience and her liturgy is the real Christian spirituality.⁶² In short, the Christian life has to be centred on the

⁵⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14.

⁵⁸ Dom Braso, "Liturgy and Spirituality" cited in Powathil, "Ecclesial Formation According to the Oriental Traditions," ed. Xavier Koodapuzha, *Oriental Churches Theological Dimensions*. Kottayam: OIRSI, 1988, 91.

⁵⁹ Dom Braso, "Liturgy and Spirituality" cited in Powathil, "Ecclesial Formation According to the Oriental Traditions," 91.

⁶⁰ Varghese Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Thomas Christians," 130.

⁶¹ Varghese Pathikulangara, *A Moment with Jesus*, 16.

⁶² Lonappan Arangassery, "The Source and Summit of the Spirituality of Missionary Priests," in *The Folly of the Cross: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Varghese Pathikulangara*, CMI, ed. Paulachan Kochappilly, 16-176, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, 170.

liturgy through which work of human redemption is carried out. Thus the life is totally influenced by liturgy. It is called liturgical spirituality and it is the essence of ecclesial spirituality.⁶³

8. Steps for Renewal and Reorientation

Fidelity to the tradition and return to the authentic sources⁶⁴ are essential and primary requirements for an authentic restoration. The Christian faithful are to be given proper catechetical formation based on their liturgy congenial to their ecclesial identity. The catechesis should be such that it leads one to the liturgy and draw inspiration from the same. Liturgical spirituality is the principal means of Christian formation. The true spirituality which is liturgical and ecclesial can be promoted and nurtured only by catechesis. The formation of the seminarians and catechists are to be done accordingly. The family prayer also may be done in such a way that it is consonant with the spirit of the liturgical year and fostering liturgical spirituality. It is also necessary to bring back certain pious practices and devotions to the norm of the authentic liturgy. The pious practices that crept in the life of the faithful keep them away from the authentic liturgical spirituality. If one concentrates

on the devotions one may fail to return to the liturgy.⁶⁵

The success of renewal and restoration depends very much on the training of the priests and the religious. The priests should be imbued with the spirit of the liturgy and it can be achieved only through genuine formation according to the ecclesial traditions of one's own Church. An ongoing liturgical formation to the priests also is necessary.

The religious also have an important role to play in the renewal and reorientation as they are a great force in the Church.⁶⁶ They are at the service of the Church and hence their formation has to be ecclesial oriented. For the proper formation, it is advisable to have the formation houses in the territories under Syro-Malabar hierarchs in order to grow in the spirituality and heritage of one's own Church. Mattam instructs:

During the whole period of formation, aspirancy to Novitiate, the candidates should be given the opportunity to learn and appreciate the heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church, to develop a spirituality drawing from the sources which this Church offers: liturgical life according to Seasons, the Holy *Qurbana*,

⁶³ Joseph Powathil, "Ecclesial Formation to the Oriental Traditions," in *Oriental Churches: Theological Dimensions*, ed. Xavier Koodapuzha, 85-98, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1988, 88.

⁶⁴ Xavier Koodapuzha, *Oriental Churches: An Introduction*, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1996, 72-73.

⁶⁵ Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety*, 248-250.

⁶⁶ Abraham Mattam, *Forgotten East: Mission, Liturgy and Spirituality of the Eastern Churches*, 110.

the feasts of the Calendar, the Divine Office etc. The formation is not to be based on the spirituality and liturgy of another Church.⁶⁷

Syro-Malabar Church needs a revolutionary change in the field of liturgical spirituality. It seems that Monthly devotions⁶⁸ and Novenas are given undue importance. They are not in accordance with the arrangement and spirit of the liturgical year of this Church.⁶⁹ Over-emphasis on Prayer Meetings and Bible Services in place of Liturgy of the Hours, Charismatic Prayer Meetings and Healing Services, various types of Eucharistic Adorations including the recent practices of Night Vigil at the cost of the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*, Benediction, Novenas, Special Prayers etc. immediately after the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*, First Friday Devotions etc are not part of the genius of the Eastern Spirituality. All devotions are to be rearranged according to the liturgical seasons. Second Vatican Council directs, "...Devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the

liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."⁷⁰ Instead of personal, individualistic and popular devotions liturgical and ecclesial celebrations must be given prime importance.

The proper liturgical celebrations must be given prime importance in all the feast celebrations. There are liturgical celebrations to suit any time of the day. *Ramsa*, the Evening Liturgy, *Lelya*, the Night Liturgy, *Sapra*, the Morning Liturgy and *Endana*, the Noon Liturgy can help one to celebrate the various hours of the day⁷¹ and there are Sacramentals for various occasions. They must be preferred to than going after superficial and sentimental prayers. Living according to the liturgical spirituality of ones own Church is not sectarian. This realization will lead to the real communion of the Churches. Stressing on the ecclesial identity is not the rejection of the ecclesial pluralism.

⁶⁷ Abraham Mattam, *Forgotten East: Mission, Liturgy and Spirituality of the Eastern Churches*, 113.

⁶⁸ March devotion to St. Joseph, May devotion to Mary, Rosary devotion of October, November devotion to souls in Purgatory...etc. are not according to the spirituality of Syro-Malabar Church.

⁶⁹ Varghese Pathikulangara, *A Moment with Jesus*, 15.

⁷⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13.

⁷¹ There are seven prayer hours: 1. *Ramsa*-Evening Prayer celebrated at 6:00 p.m., 2. *Subbba*-Prayer after supper at 9:00 p.m., 3. *Lelya*-Night Liturgy at midnight, 4. *Qala d-Sahra*-Vigil at 3:00 a.m., 5. *Sapra*-Morning Liturgy at 6:00 a.m., 6. *Quttaa*-Prayer of the Third Hour at 9:00 a.m. and 7. *Endana*-Noon Liturgy at mid-day.

The monastic life has a crucial role in the renewal and growth of the Church. The Syro-Malabar Church has taken modest attempts in establishing monasteries.⁷² Since they take the interests of the Church at heart, such movements will surely lead to the renewal and reorientation of the Church.⁷³

The liturgical reform is the concern of the Church. It is not the likes and dislikes of the individuals that tell upon the reform and restoration of liturgy. Since the nature of liturgy radically affects the nature of the Church, liturgical renewal will have a direct impact on the nature of the Church also. That means liturgical renewal is not a simple renewal of a text but the renewal of the Church. "Fidelity to the rites and to the authentic texts of the Liturgy is a requirement of the *Lex orandi*, which must always be in conformity with the *Lex credendi*."⁷⁴

10. Conclusion

The spirituality of a Christian springs out of the spirituality of one's mother Church. The source and summit of the spirituality of the Church is the liturgy of

that particular Church; for the authentic Christian Spirituality is experiencing God in Christ in the liturgy of the Church. Therefore one has to experience Christ in the authentic liturgical celebrations of one's own proper ecclesial tradition. This is the mind of the Eastern Churches and 'fulfilling the obligation' is unknown to them. Only a genuine liturgy reflects the genuine spirituality. Hence the attempt is to be faithful to the liturgy to lead a genuine spiritual life.

Spiritual life is a life in Christ and the basis of that Christian spirituality is the faith in Christ. "Abide in me as I abide in you" (Jn 15:4). It is the liturgy of the Church that enables one to abide in Christ. Christian spirituality is basically and essentially a liturgical spirituality. Therefore, in the present context of the emergence of numerous "Spiritual Movements" and "Centres of Spiritual Ecstasy and Devotions" that are sentimental and superfluous, the life of each Christian has to be centred on liturgy or has to re-orientate one's spirituality to that of the mother Church to avoid the deviation from the authentic Christian Spirituality.

⁷² The monastery for women called *Bet-Toma* at Palamattam near Changanasery in Kerala and the *Mar Toma Sliha* Monastery at Nallathanny in the diocese of Kanjirapally in Kerala are bold steps in this line. Sisters of *Bet-Toma* have published through Denha Services, the prayers for *Qala d-Sahara*, *Qutta-a*, *Endana* and *D'bas'sa Saen*. Seven Times of Prayer in day are suggested to be as follows: Ramsa (6 PM), Lelya (9 PM), *Qala d-Sahara* (3 AM), *Sapra* (6 AM), *Qutta-a* (9 AM), *Endana* (12 PM) and *D'bas'sa Saen* (3 PM). This rescheduling of the timing is in view of situation of modern man needing six hours of rest in the night.

⁷³ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Resurrection, Life and Renewal*, 293.

⁷⁴ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, cited in Abraham Mattam, *Forgotten East: Mission, Liturgy and Spirituality of the Eastern Churches*, 142.

The Rite of Trisagion in the Syro-Malabar Liturgy

Dr. Joseph Roby Alencherry

Trisagion, literally meaning 'thrice-holy' (*tris-agion*), is the name given to the liturgical hymn "Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us". This hymn is sung in all liturgical traditions, both Eastern and Western. In the Latin rite it is used at the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, whereas in the Oriental rites it is used in most liturgical services, above all, in the Holy Eucharist.¹ In the Syro-Malabar liturgy this hymn is placed before the Scriptural readings of the Holy *Qurbana* and it is recited in the course of the Liturgy of Hours. The Trisagion in the East Syriac tradition has a unique rite: the hymn is always initiated after the deacon's proclamation "Lift up your voices and glorify the living God, O all people". Afterwards, the hymn is sung thrice by alternating choirs with the minor doxology.

This article aims to describe the liturgical history of this rite in the East

Syriac tradition, basing on early Syriac sources. The study proceeds under five sections. First of all, we try to determine the period in which Trisagion entered into the East Syriac liturgy. The second section deals with the main East Syriac sources on the origin of Trisagion. The textual aspects and the addressee of the hymn are analysed in the following two sections respectively. Finally, the liturgical function of this hymn in the East Syriac liturgy is briefly commented on. All the texts given as indented quotations within the article are our translations from the Syriac sources.

1. Introduction of Trisagion into the East Syriac Liturgy

Though the exact origin of Trisagion is obscure, it is generally accepted that the hymn arose in the Greek speaking eastern provinces of the Roman empire.² In the middle of 5th century, Trisagion was

¹ For a recent study of the Trisagion from a comparative liturgical perspective, see S. JANERAS, "Le Trisagion: une formule brève en liturgie comparée", *Acts of the International Congress 'Comparative Liturgy Fifty years after Anton Baumstark (1872-1949)' Rome, 25-29 September 1998*, R. F. Taft & G. Winkler (eds.), OCA 265 (2001) 495-562 (= JANERAS, "Trisagion").

² S. BROCK, "The origins of the *qanona* 'Holy God, holy Mighty, holy Immortal' according to Gabriel of Qatar (early 7th century)", *Harp* 21 (2006) 174 (= BROCK, "Origins of Holy God").

apparently used as a popular hymn or a processional antiphon during stational services in Constantinople and in early sixth century it entered into the liturgy as introit of the Eucharistic Service of the Great Church.³ Most probably it was Catholicos Mar Abba (540-552), after his voyages in Constantinople, who introduced many liturgical usages of the Great Church in the East Syriac liturgy, including Trisagion.⁴ Catholicos Ishoyabh I (581-595) is the first to attest its liturgical use in the East Syriac liturgy. Ishoyabh, who was the head of the School of Nisibis from 565 to 568, in fact has written a theological commentary on Trisagion. In this commentary written at the request of his master Abraham, Ishoyabh names Trisagion as *qanonâ* (antiphon) and confirms its use in every evening and morning service (*Ramšâ* and *Saprâ*).

We also, weak disciples of Apostles and Fathers and servants of the Lord God Christ, Lord of all, today with trust and aid from the power of Christ, shall narrate to the flock of our Saviour the account of the *qanonâ*

'Holy God' that is said at the evening and morning (service) in the Church of God everywhere under heaven. When the vigilant and careful mind hear its cause and its account, and likewise also its explanation, they will be in each (service of) evening and morning incited to praise the Holy Trinity, the doctrine that is from the Holy Spirit in all ages and in all moments.⁵

The liturgical Commentary of Gabriel Qatraya (CGQ) of the early 7th century witnesses the use of Trisagion not only in the Liturgy of Hours but also in the Holy Eucharist/Mysteries (*Râzê*). Jammo has convincingly argued that Trisagion did not belong to the original structure of *Râzê* but was later inserted after its structure was well established.⁶ The same argumentation is true for *Ramšâ* and *Saprâ* as well and this explains why this Greek hymn was translated and appended to the end of these services rather than being inserted inside their established structure.⁷ In any case, Trisagion was certainly part of East Syriac liturgy by the middle of 6th century.

³ R. TAFT, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, Rome 1997, 215-216; J. MATEOS, *La célébration de la parole dans la liturgie byzantine*, OCA 191, Roma 1971, 99-100, 112-114.

⁴ S. Y. H. JAMMO, *La Structure de la messe chaldéenne, du début jusqu'à l'anaphore: Etude historique*, OCA 207 (1979) 93 (=JAMMO, *Structure*).

⁵ G. FURLANI, "Il trattato di Yesho'yahb d'Arzon sul Trisagion", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 7 (1916-18) 690:9-17.

⁶ JAMMO, *Structure* 97.

⁷ According to the original Syriac text, Trisagion is sung at the end of *Ramšâ* and *Saprâ*. But in the reformed Malayalam text, the position of Trisagion has been adapted.

The Monophysite incise of the Trisagion, “who was crucified for us”, was never used in East Syriac liturgy, neither in Persia nor in Malabar. This historical fact is explicitly stated in the Canons of Catholicos Timothy I (780-823).⁸

2. Origin and ‘Cause’ of Trisagion

In the sixth century a new and rather unique literary genre called ܐܠܠܐ, ‘Cause’, came into use in the curriculum of the School of Nisibis.⁹ The subject matter of this genre concerned with the origin and meaning of Christian institutions, feasts celebrated during the ecclesiastical year and hymns used in liturgy. “Cause” genre is not simply a historical reconstruction of past, and therefore, it is important to filter facts from legends in such literature.

Regarding the “Cause” of Trisagion, in contrast to West Syriac tradition, East Syriac liturgy shares more or less a common

tradition with the Byzantines, though in details there are variations: it was revealed in Constantinople during an earthquake, in the background of theopaschism and cyrillianism in the first half of 5th century.¹⁰ The phrase “who was crucified for us” was a later Monophysitic addition in late 5th century, as a counter attack against dyophysite doctrine. We briefly examine the six main East Syriac sources on the origin of Trisagion.

1. The earliest source is in an interpolated passage of the “Book of Heraclides of Damascus”, therefore, of Pseudo-Nestorius. The work was already known in Persia in its Syriac version around 540. The assumption that it was Mar Abba who brought this work back from the Roman empire and had it translated, is conjectural.¹¹ The reference on Trisagion occurs in the background of theopaschism but without any mention on the incise,

⁸ “In omnibus provinciis Babel, Pars et Atur, in omnibus regionibus ubi sol oritur et apud Indos, et apud Sinas et apud Tibetas, sicut apud Turcas, et in omnibus civitatibus... quae sub Throno illo patriarchali sant... hoc Trisagion semper sine additamento... dictum est.” H. LABOURT, *De Timotheo I Nestorianorum patriarcha*, Paris 1904, 45.

⁹ It is not clear when exactly and by whom this genre was introduced in the School (probably by Narsai), but it is certain that the oldest specimens that have been preserved were initially transmitted orally by the teachers. G. J. REININK, “The Cause of the Commemoration of Mary: Author, Date and Christology”, *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, G. Kiraz (ed.), Piscataway 2008, 517.

¹⁰ S. Janeras and S. Brock has given an excellent overview and summary on the different accounts of the origins of Trisagion. Their works are already quoted above.

¹¹ S. BROCK, “Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and it’s Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire”, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*, Chapter II, Aldershot 2006, 79.

“who was crucified for us”, attributed to Peter the Fuller around the year 470. The interpolated passage lists various disasters, including earthquake and falling of vast stones in the forum of Theodosius the Great, seen as a punishment for theopaschite teaching. The origin of Trisagion is simply presented as if revealed by God himself (“God gave it”) as a supplication (ܡܠܝܬܐ) in order to combat the heresy, but with no direct reference to the place of origin or to how the disasters ceased when the hymn was sung.¹² L. Abramowski

dates this passage between 451 (death of Nestorius) and 470.¹³ Whereas for Janeras the text refers to events of 431-433, and it attests an Antiochene and diphysite origin of Trisagion before the said period.¹⁴ It may be noted here that Severos of Antioch in his homily on Trisagion delivered in 518 attests explicitly to its Antiochene origin.¹⁵

2. The earliest complete treatise on Trisagion is a work, in the form of ‘Cause’ genre, written by Catholicos Ishoyahb I of Arzon (581-595).¹⁶ This work gives a more detailed account of the origin of Trisagion

¹² “But, since he wished to bring them to perceive their blasphemy and to desist therefrom, because they came not thereto, God himself gave unto them a manner of intercession - for he who should do this had not been found - whereby they should say: ‘Holy God, holy [and] mighty, holy [and] immortal, have mercy upon us.’ And every one assented with one mind thereto and left off the things for which they had yearned [and] for which God had not yearned. And they wrote this down in the basilica and in public and set it up thus: ‘Glory and thanks to the holy one and to the immortal, God the saviour of all’; and they had almost succeeded in confessing God immortal; and that to which they clung they denied not, but this was sung in every place. But after the earthquake had ceased and a few wars were arising, they roused themselves again and revealed themselves against God; and they were dissembling the confession [of faith] in God, as persons that remembered not the [formula] ‘God the holy one and mighty and immortal’, who was able / to bring wars to peace even without human might, wherein was his might and except for which there was not [any kind] of preparation [for war]; and they have made trial of this thing in fact. Now indeed they have ceased even from [this] supplication.” *The Bazaar of Heraclides*, G. R. Driver & L. Hodgson (trs.), Oxford 1925, 365 [for Syriac text: *Le livre d’Héraclide de Damas*, P. Bedjan (ed.), Paris/Leipzig 1910].

¹³ L. ABRAMOWSKI, *Untersuchungen zum Liber Heraclidis des Nestorius*, CSCO 242, Subsidia 22 (1963) 119.

¹⁴ JANERAS, “Trisagion” 540.

¹⁵ Homily 125: “Et c’est par notre ville d’Antioche que cette louange a commencé, par où a commencé également les nom des chrétiens; mais déjà et elle est parvenue jusqu’aux Églises d’Asie et elle fait son chemin dorénavant vers toutes les Églises”: PO 29/1 249.

¹⁶ G. FURLANI, “Il trattato di Yesho’yahb d’Arzon sul Trisagion”, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 7 (1916-18) 687-705, Syriac text in 690-698 (= *Ishoyahb I’s Cause of Trisagion*). But Brock refers to this *Cause* as if of Ishoyahb II (628-645). BROCK, “Origins of Holy God” 176.

than the “Book of Heraclides”, and this version subsequently turns up in all later sources. During a time of earthquake, which was itself a punishment for the wickedness of the people of the Great city, Trisagion was revealed by a holy angel to a saintly presbyter of the ‘Great Church’ of Constantinople, and once it was introduced the quake that had lasted for forty days ceased all of a sudden.

One of the holy angels appeared in dream to one of the presbyters of the Great Church, a man very acknowledged in righteousness, and said to him, “Stand up, and go immediately to the Great Church and there with high voice praise as this: God who is above all, Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. And immediately the quake will stop, and there will be great serenity in the whole

community”. (...) And when this *qanonâ* was said three times, there was great serenity and the quake stopped completely.¹⁷

Regarding the incise (“who was crucified for us”), this commentary states that it was ordered by emperor Anastasius (491-518) who favoured the opponents of Chalcedon, but this addition was not accepted in the great cities of Constantinople, Jerusalem and Rome.

3. The third source is the Commentary of Gabriel Qatraya (CGQ) which dedicates a whole question on the ‘cause’ of Trisagion.¹⁸ Sebastian Brock, who offered an English translation to this unedited text, has already noted the similarity between the accounts of CGQ and of Ishoyahb I, suggesting that they are both drawing on a common source. This can be demonstrated by a comparison

¹⁷ *Ishoyahb I's Cause of Trisagion* 692:16-21; 693:7-8.

¹⁸ For English translation, see BROCK, “Origins of Holy God” 173-185. The liturgical commentary of Rabban Gabriel Qatraya bar Lipah is the earliest and most comprehensive witness to East Syriac daily liturgy. The unedited text is found in a unique Ms Or.3336, conserved in the British Library, London. The author is not yet clearly identified, but it is certain that he wrote the commentary in the early decades of the seventh century, before the liturgical reforms of Ishoyahb III. The region of Qatar was an intellectual centre during this period. The literary genre of this commentary (*erotapokriseis*) and the title of its author (Rabban) hint at a School-cenobitic background in which the text was conceived.

between the text (see *italics*) but with new liturgical adaptations (see **bold**).

Ishoyahb I	CGQ
<p><i>(Angel) appeared to him a third time, and said, "believe me, my man, for I am one of those who stand before the Lord, Lord of all, and I am being sent to announce you the salvation; therefore, do not fear to enter the city, for the Lord is near and is preparing to grant you the loving-kindness. Behold, when you enter in the Church, you will find me before you, and what you hear me saying, you also say".</i> The blessed presbyter took courage and went to the city with a few (others) with him, and they found the angel standing before the sanctuary and praising God in a loud voice saying, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us". Then, they also began (to sing), and when this qanonâ was said three times, there was great serenity and the quake stopped completely.¹⁹</p>	<p><i>The angel appeared to him on a third night, saying, "believe me, my man, I am one of those who stand before God and with great eagerness transmit his instructions; therefore go into the city and do not be afraid, for the Lord is preparing to act in mercy towards you. And when you enter the city, you will find me: what I say, do you say (too) – and the earthquake will cease. Then the priest arose in the morning, and (taking) some people with him, they entered the Church in the city, and the priest saw the angel standing in the nave, in front of the sanctuary; in a loud voice he was saying "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us". Then that priest and the people with them responded [25a] to the angel with the same qanonâ, and when they had said it three times, the earthquake ceased.²⁰</i></p>

¹⁹ Ishoyahb I's *Cause of Trisagion* 692,25-693,8.

²⁰ BROCK, "Origins of Holy God" 182. The author is not yet clearly identified. Since this work is merely an abbreviation of the *Commentary of Gabriel Qatraya*, it confirms the popularity and value of the latter in the East Syriac circles.

CGQ places the earthquake in the reign of Theodosius II (408-450). CGQ has a similar account of falling of stones as in "Book of Heraclides", but with an additional element of the 'statue of Theodosius the Great'; for Brock, this was introduced into the narrative after 480.²¹ On the incise, CGQ follows the facts given by Ishoyahb I.

4. Commentary of Abraham bar Lipah's (first half of the 7th century) account on Trisagion is nothing other than an abbreviation and paraphrase of CGQ.²²

Cause of the *Qanonâ* 'Holy'. In the time of emperor Theodosius, the Less, who due to his slackness in that he allowed corruption to enter the true faith, through the seditiousness of Satan and presumptuous Cyril; while causing people to shut their ears from listening the true teaching, and causing to suffer the divine Nature in their (songs of) praise. God allowed them to be disciplined by various chastisements; and a fearful punishment was sent against the mother city. As they had provoked the holy angels in their (songs of) praise, and had caused heaven to tremble of their blasphemies, they

likewise caused the earth beneath them to tremble, causing the strong towers of their walls to shake. The earthquake lasted forty days without ceasing, night or day. When they still did not (repent) of their folly, (God) added them a further affliction, during this earthquake: there was a huge pillar built in the middle of the city, above which a statue of the emperor Theodosius the Great was fixed. Vast stones bound with iron and lead were removed from this and were conveyed in the air for a long time without falling on the earth. Everyone was terrified lest all of a sudden the (stones) fall on him, and so all the inhabitants of the city fled to the wilderness; and every evening they expected not to see the night through, and in the morning they did not believe that (their) buildings (perhaps corrupted: alive) would remain until the evening. After that they had lost hope of their lives. God, who in his wisdom measures up his chastisements, sent one of the heavenly hosts, and he appeared to a certain virtuous priest, and commanded him saying, 'enter the city, go to the Church, and say this *qanonâ* three times, and the

²¹ For Brock, possibly the statue was introduced at some time after the earthquake of 480, when the statue of Theodosius I in the Forum Tauri is recorded as having fallen from its column during an earthquake. For details: BROCK, "Origins of Holy God" 181 note 26.

²² BROCK, "Origins of Holy God" 179-180 note 22. The commentary of Abraham bar Lipah of Qatar belongs to the first half of the seventh century. The author is not yet clearly identified. Since this work is merely an abbreviation of the Commentary of Gabriel Qatraya, it confirms the popularity and value of the latter.

earthquake will cease'. But when the priest narrated the dream to others, the apparition seem to them to be a delusion. The angel appeared to him again and said to him the very same things. When the priest was (still) in doubt, the angel appeared to him on a third night, saying, "believe me, O man, I am one of those who stand before God; go into the city and do not be afraid, for the Lord is preparing to act in mercy towards you. And when you enter the city, you will find me: what I say, you do say (too) – and the earthquake will cease".

Then the priest arose in the morning, and (taking) some people with him, they entered the city, and entered into the Church, and the priest saw the angel standing in the nave ("), in front of the sanctuary (!); and in a loud voice he was saying "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us". Then that priest and the people with them responded to the angel, and when they had said it three times, the earthquake ceased. Anastasius Caesar, in his presumptuousness resorted to giving orders that it should be altered in all

the churches that were subject to this authority: instead of "Holy Immortal, have mercy on us"; on his own authority, he ordered that the following be said, "...Holy Immortal, who was crucified for us". (He did this) without feeling any shame or fear of altering the wondrous composition that had been handed over by a holy angel to human beings. The capital city of Constantinople refused to change this *qanonâ*; so too did Jerusalem and the western regions. Instead, they say, just as we do.²³

5. The most extensive liturgical commentary of East Syriac liturgy is the commentary on the Ecclesiastical Services (CES), written in the threshold of 8th and 9th century.²⁴ CES puts together from different sources further data on the origin of Trisagion: the earthquake took place around the year 436 and the presbyter's name was Proclus, who probably after becoming bishop of Constantinople (434-446) ordered it at the end of Church services.²⁵ CES also specifies that Peter the Fuller, Patriarch of Antioch (468-470) added the Monophysite incise.

²³ *Anonymi auctoris Expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo ascripta. Accedit Abrahæ Bar Lipeh Interpretatio Officiorum II*, R. H. CONNOLLY (ed. & tr.), CSCO, Scriptores Syri, series 2, t. 92, Roma 1915, 166-168.

²⁴ The author is generally known as "Pseudo-George of Arbela" or "Anonymous Author", but according to modern scholarship, the author is by all probability Abdisho bar Bahriz, Metropolitan of Mosul (died ca. 828). For details see J. ALENCHERRY, "The Author of Pseudo-George of Arbela", *Urha* 4 (2010) 53-61.

²⁵ Proclus is associated to the origin of Trisagion in other sources too. See JANERAS, "Trisagion" 543; BROCK, "Origins of Holy God" 178.

According to what the teachers, inspired by the Spirit and the ecclesiastical chronicles hand down, this is what they have written: in the year 748 of the Greeks (AD 436/7), and in the twenty-fifth year of the emperor Theodosius, four years after the un-canonical synod of Ephesus had gathered under the wicked Cyril and the holy Nestorius was cast out, in the year that the 'sons of Ephesus' were resuscitated, a great quake occurred in Byzantium, and rocks broke off from amidst the city wall and hovered above the city. And as people began to panic, flee and exit, for they thought that the city was going to be demolished, angels appeared to a presbyter of the Church of Byzantium, whose name was Proclus, and they were praising in Greek tongue and saying: "Holy God Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us". And the angel cautioned him to gather the people in Church and to say the words which he heard. And the presbyter gathered the people in the Church and cried out before them, and they cried out after him three times, and the city was calmed and the quake ceased. And when this was heard in every land, it was manifested to this blessed one that this canon should

be said at the end of the service. For just as mercy was given to them at this time of distress, God's mercy will visit us at all times when we say this *qanonâ*. Peter the Fuller, a heretic belonging to the mind of Severus, who was the patriarch at Antioch, added to this *qanonâ* 'who was crucified for us'. This is the cause why *qanonâ* is said here.²⁶

6. The last source is the Commentary of Abdisho bar Brika which adds nothing new regarding the origin of Trisagion, except the attribution of the incise to Severus, Patriarch of Antioch (512-518) during the reign of Anastasius.²⁷

Qanonâ of Holy: the exaltation of the thrice-blessed Natures, that the Angel of the Lord taught one holy priest in Constantinople, at time (when) a terrible earthquake came heavily; and the Angel commanded all people to say it three times; and on account of it, ceased the alarmed earthquake; and thus it happened. For this the herald of the Church says: "Lift your voices and glorify all people". This, "who was crucified for us" that the Jacobites say, is added by Saverius, and had obtained stability by assistance of Emperor Anastasius.²⁸

²⁶ *Anonymi auctoris Expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo ascripta*. I-II, R. H. CONNOLLY (ed.), CSCO 64 Scriptorum Syri, series 2, t. 91, Paris-Roma 1911, Syriac text 187,9-188,2.

²⁷ Abdisho bar Brika in his *Book on the Order of Church Regulations* composed in 1315/16 for the use of judges and directors of the ecclesiastical courts, the third tract gives a brief liturgical commentary on Church Services. Our English translation is based on the Syriac edition, prepared by J. Kelaitha.

²⁸ English Title: *Book on the Order of Church Regulations: Written by Mar Abdisho, Metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia*, J. Kelaitha, Urmia, Persia 1918, Syriac text 46a-b.

3. Textual Composition

J. M. Hanssens had thought that the East Syriac formulation of Trisagion is same as the Byzantine.²⁹ But Jammo and Janeras have well demonstrated the distinction of Syriac grammatical composition from its Greek counterpart.³⁰ In Greek, 'Holy' (ο θεός) is always used with the implicit verbal form, but can take either nominative third person as 'God is holy...' or vocative second person as 'O God, you are holy...'. Juan Mateos considers the former as the original Byzantine form, whereas the latter usage is practised in West Syriac rite.³¹ But in East Syriac liturgy, the first three acclamations are translated as invocations in the second person with no verbal form, "O Holy God, O Holy Mighty, O Holy Immortal". The final part of Trisagion is the earliest liturgical supplication, "Kyrie eleison".

The text of Trisagion is an amplification of the triple Seraphic 'Holy' in Isaiah's vision (6:3).³² Gabriel Qatraya

interprets it in this way. Indeed, it uses the liturgical text of Is 6:3 that refers to "heaven and earth" and not the biblical, "the whole earth"; it uses not "Lord God of Sabaoth" of LXX but "Lord Almighty" of Peshitta as also found in Rev 4:8: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty".

[fol. 26a] It is the composition of a holy angel, and in its structure and wording it resembles the three sanctifications which the blessed Isaiah heard from the holy Seraphs who fly about crying out one to another, saying "Holy, holy, holy, Lord Almighty. Heaven and earth are full of his praises" (Is 6:3).

In East Syriac tradition, Trisagion is termed *qanonâ* by all commentaries, in contrast to *lâkumârâ* which is called *qanonâ* only in CGQ but later on *'onitâ*. According to Mateos and Jammo, it is called *qanonâ* in the sense of an antiphon, for it is sung antiphonally three times with *Gloria Patri*.³³

²⁹ Hanssens describes that the ESL formulation as "ipsam formulam byzantinam sine ullo discrimine". J. M. HANSENS, *Institutiones liturgicae de ritibus orientalibus*, II-III, Romae 1930-32, here III, 149.

³⁰ JAMMO, *Structure* 94; JANERAS, "Trisagion" 528-533.

³¹ J. MATEOS, *La célébration de la parole dans la liturgie byzantine*, OCA 191, Roma 1971, 98-99; JANERAS, "Trisagion" 529.

³² A sixth century monk Job, held that it was simply a juxtaposition of Is 6:3 with Ps 42:2 where some Gk mss have "My soul has thirsted for God, the Mighty, the living (that is, Immortal). See JANERAS, "La Trisagion" 519-520.

³³ J. MATEOS, *Lelya-Sapra: Les offices chaldéennes de la nuit et du matin*, OCA 156 (1972), 98 note 1; JAMMO, *Structure* 94. The following passage from the Commentary of Ishoyahb I on Trisagion indicates that the term *qanonâ* can have the same sense of 'Canon of Scripture': a text officially authenticated by Church as inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore considered closed (no more addition or removal). In this sense, Trisagion is an angelic canon. "The city (Constantinople) which had the tradition of this *qanonâ* from the Holy Spirit did not admit to introduce (the incise) for two (motives).

4. Addressee

It is clear that originally different geographical areas understood Trisagion in different ways: at Constantinople, Jerusalem and in the West, it was taken to be addressed to the Trinity, whereas in Syria, parts of Asia Minor and Egypt it was understood as referring to Christ. Unfortunately, what had started out as a geographical difference in interpretation came to be regarded as hall-mark of ecclesiastical identity. Since the opposition due to the doctrinal definition of Chalcedon was particularly strong in Syria, the addition of "who was crucified for us" came to be taken as an identifying characteristic of all anti-Chalcedonians. In the Chalcedonian tradition, the Constantinopolitan understanding of Trisagion was subsequently refined with additional explanation 'Holy God' referring to the Father, 'Holy Mighty' to the Son and the

'Holy Immortal' to the Holy Spirit, and this became later Byzantine understanding.

For Brock and Janeras, the Christological understanding of Trisagion is earlier than the Trinitarian, and the original context was indeed that of the crucifixion.³⁴ Indeed, in the "Book of Heraclides" we have allusions to its origin from the Antiochene Christological tradition.³⁵ Jammo after analyzing various liturgical texts in *Hudrâ* concludes that Trisagion was used to praise not only the divine Nature or Trinity but also Christ.³⁶ It is well noted that the archaic prayers of East Syriac liturgy were largely addressed to Christ. Nevertheless, the earliest commentaries on Trisagion, of Ishoyahb I and of Gabriel Qatraya, both belonging to the (Persian) School tradition, favoured the Constantinopolitan Trinitarian interpretation but with an originality: Trisagion is understood as referring to the divine

For its inhabitants said, "we, that is our Fathers, we have received the angelic *qanonâ*; it will be very foolish and also wicked, if we, while our Fathers had received the good tradition from heaven by which they were saved from the vehement punishment that effaced life, pervert and change the heavenly tradition with the words of earthy man (...)". *Ishoyahb I's Cause of Trisagion* 697,5-11.

³⁴ S. Brock, "The Thrice-Holy Hymn in the Liturgy", *Sobornost* 7 (1985) 29; JANERAS, "Trisagion" 560.

³⁵ "Because men made compensation unto God, having confessed him [to be] both holy and mighty and immortal, both by law and by commands and by penalties they confirmed [their actions] against those who confessed God the Word [to be] holy and mighty and immortal and [punished them] with despoilment and exile and death, until Theodosius, who had raised himself up against God, was taken from [their] midst; and the mouth [of every man] was opened to confess and to glorify and to adore God the holy and mighty and immortal, speaking without fear. For not he who calls Christ God passible and mortal confesses Christ [to be] God, but he who speaks of Christ in his divinity which he is in his nature and confesses God impassible and immortal and mighty and holy in his nature but passible in his humanity, in that he confesses that he is by nature man." *Bazaar of Heraclides* 369.

³⁶ JAMMO, *Structure* 96.

Nature of the triune God, thus providing an interpretation of the identity of the addressee that differs from that of the Byzantine tradition. The later commentaries no more posited such theological issues with regard to Trisagion.

4.1 Commentary of Catholicos Ishoyahb I

The work of Ishoyahb I is the earliest known commentary of Trisagion in any liturgical tradition. According to this commentary, the angelic hymn is nothing but a concise definition of God. It specifies that 'Holy God' refers to the Nature (ܚܠܐ) of God, 'Holy Mighty' to the attributes of that Nature and 'Holy Immortal' to what God is not. It may be remembered that in the East Syriac connotation the term nature (ܚܠܐ) is generic, and it is associated much more closely with 'essence' than with *prosopon*, while *qnomâ* is an individual manifestation of a nature. The three acclamations of 'Holy' refer to the one Nature of the triune God, and not to the three *Qnomê* of the Trinity; where as with the three-fold repetition of Trisagion, we praise the three *Qnomê* in their one Nature.

The name 'Holy' as essential quality is only to God, as it is said by the Prophet, "Lord has sworn the dominions by his holiness" (Amos 4:2), that is, God swore by the immutability of his nature; and blessed apostle also teaches this, "God for our advantage, that we may become partakers of his holiness" (Heb 12:10), that is, he did all (things) with mercies for our advantage, until we are made worthy for the gift of

immutability from him. This is equal also to that Holy Spirit was telling to blessed Virgin Mary, when he was announcing her on the greatness of our saviour, "who is born from you will be holy and he will be called 'son of the Most High'" (Lk 1:35.32); with 'be holy' he meant the immutability and with 'the Most High' he signified his immortality; he used both of them very aptly. For it is proper to holy and to son of God, that he is above death and change. Because of this, the spirits (angels) said 'Holy God', that is, it is right that God is made holy always and to him the praise of holiness is proper because all these of his own are immutable.

Thus also the name of God means (his) nature. According to the usage of Hebrews, the name of God is understood as 'Judge', others say 'Creator'. According to the use of Greeks, it is understood as 'Cause of all'. As proper, the eternal nature agrees to the name of God. Since it was used by a holy angel, the name of nature that agrees to the essence, he added 'Holy'. Thus he willed to hallow and to praise also the (attributes) that the nature has naturally just as he had hallowed the nature, praised of divinity. Through one of these (attributes) he indicated all; he was compelled to say this one out of many (attributes) because he (wanted) to make his discourse very brief, and so he added 'Holy Mighty', that he was able to say very briefly on the nature and on (the attributes) of nature, as Being who is living, spiritual, hidden, infinite and similar

as these; but all these he included in that of 'Holy God'. On the attributes of nature he was able to say: intelligent, good, prognostic and similar as these; but also all these he included in it saying, 'Holy Mighty' and he placed all these glories (attributes) in the name of 'Mighty'.

After thus (dealt) wisely in brief on nature and on these (attributes) of nature, he adds another (word) that does not signify the nature, that is, what it is or how is it, not even the attributes of nature, but signifies what God does not have; on this, he adds to holiness the word 'Holy Immortal'. In this he used very briefly and placed from many (only) one among them (that God does not have). However, he could have said, incorruptibility, immutability, imperturbability, non-inclinability or similar as these. But in that of immortality he included all of them. But he did not show what God is in it or in those said above, but instead to say God is not mortality, that is, he is a being without beginning and without end, and death does not kill the life of his being and change does not touch. As, God is good, and he is not bad, with 'good' is said what God is and with 'not bad' what he is not. The same discourse (therefore) with two variations: if you affirm 'good' you show that he has, and you signify also on those he does not have; and if affirm 'not bad' you show what he has not, and you signify also what he

has. Thus also (the word) 'Immortal' that the (angelic) spirit set in place to say living, whose life is not ...(text is corrupt).

And to all these (words) he added rightly 'have mercy on us'. The fact that nature is cause of all, while it has no cause, and is mighty than all and powerful in all and eternal, never conquered and never caused to conquer and he has naturally and essentially a superior life in weight and in measure and also in fear, this (nature) is also merciful, lover of our race, and wills our good. To him, let us ask to return towards us with mercies. Hear briefly! "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us", that means, holy in all, cause of all, mighty in all, who is not hindered by anything, answer us in your mercies, have pity on our weakness and sustain our sinfulness in your compassion. The fact that the words are tripled and not quadrupled, he signified the Trinity, he did not divide it or gave it to *qnomê*, divinity to first one, mighty to (second) one and immortal to (third) one; but (he did so) to incite and exhort them (men) with the triple praise so as to praise unceasingly the divine, mighty and immortal nature: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³⁷

4.2 Commentary of Gabriel Qatraya

The commentary of Gabriel Qatraya is pretty brief but more precise: Trisagion

³⁷ *Ishoyahb I's Cause of Trisagion* 693,15-696,5.

is the praise of orthodox faith in the immutability of the divine Nature, one in essence and three in *qnomê*, against the theopaschite doctrine. We translate a few unedited portions of CGQ.

[fol. 25a] This *qanonâ* was transmitted by a holy angel for the instruction of human beings, so that they should not suppose that the divine nature was subject to suffering and death.

[fol. 26a] So this *qanonâ*, being (words of) praise and exaltation of the divine nature, single in its essence, and threefold in its *qnomê*, which proclaims to us the unchangeableness of the divine Nature, and the distinction between the *qnomê* of the holy Trinity, and the inseparable unity of the hidden essence. It also openly rebukes the unjust heretics who dare to attribute suffering to the divine nature which is not in any way at all subject to the constraint of sufferings.

[foll. 82b-83a] Because of this, the *qanonâ* 'Holy' was composed (by angels) and was handed down to men, in which teaches us on immutability [83a] of the divine nature and the distinction of *qnomê* of Holy Trinity; and on the unity of everlasting and hidden essence, that is, His Being as being without change and without alteration; there is to him no opponent and nothing against the Lord of everything, in some way or other.

5. Liturgical Function

In *Ramšâ* and *Saprâ*, Trisagion is found exclusively at the end of the Service. Indeed, during the time of CGQ and CES, Trisagion was followed by the final priestly blessing and then the sanctuary veil was shut to show that the cathedral Service was over.

[foll. 26b-27a] That the service of *Ramšâ* is completed with the *qanonâ* 'Holy,' just as that of *Saprâ*; (this) is obvious, not only because that the priest intones the (prayer of) laying on of hands and blesses the people, but also by that we close the veil before the people, since [27a] the service has received completion. For the opening and the shutting up of the veils show the door of God's mercy, that which is not shut before the men, as often as we ask mercy from God. For just as with the service of *Saprâ*, in like manner with the service of *Ramšâ*, when the *qanonâ* of 'Holy' is finished, we shut up the veil.

Trisagion is said at the end of Sunday *Saprâ* and again, it is repeated in Sunday *Râzê*, where it is found at the early part of the celebration: between *lâkumârâ* and the Readings. If Trisagion is found exclusively at the end of daily Services how is it at the beginning of *Râzê*? For Jammo, Trisagion was inserted after the existing introit (*lâkumârâ*) as an introduction and spiritual preparation to the Readings.³⁸

³⁸ JAMMO, *Structure* 97-98.

Gabriel Winkler disagrees to associate Trisagion with the Readings, but considers it as a further expansion of the processional introit chant, similar to its use in the early Constantinople enarxis.³⁹ M. D. Findikyan rightly observes that the use of Trisagion is rooted genetically in Constantinopolitan entrance rites, but not structurally and therefore he favours its association with the Readings as found in the Armenian rite.⁴⁰ The only evidence that we could trace in this regard from the commentaries is in CES, where Trisagion is associated to the initial service rather than to the Readings. In the mystagogy of *Râzê*, CES has a pluricycled interpretation, each cycle typifies the whole economy of salvation: first cycle from the beginning till Trisagion, second cycle from Readings till expulsion of catechumens, and third cycle from the anthem of Mysteries till the final blessing. These three cycles seem to refer to the three archaic services that constitute Sunday *Râzê*: the Service of (third) Hour, the Service of the Word and the Service of the offering. Trisagion is, then, naturally

collocated at the end of the Introductory Service, and not to the liturgy of the Word.⁴¹

The rite of Trisagion in *per se* needs no presbyter, and therefore deacon can be called the liturgical minister of this rite in the East Syriac liturgy. This fact is indirectly attested in the Canonical Collection of Gabriel of Basra (ca. 884-891). According to this *Nomocanon*, neither deacons nor laymen are allowed to recite liturgical parts pertaining to priests, in their absence. Nevertheless, when no priest is present, instead of the priestly collects deacons may recite the Trisagion or the Lord's Prayer.

(The laymen) not even should say 'let us pray, peace be with us', that is rightful to the deacon; but they shall begin and end with 'Our Father'; and between each *bullâlâ*, the deacon repeats silently the same prayer of 'Our Father' or 'Holy God'.⁴²

It is the deacon who summons the people to sing the Trisagion, the litanic praise. The proclamation made by the

³⁹ G. WINKLER, "Review of Jammo, *La Structure de la messe chaldéenne, du début jusqu'à l'anaphore: Étude historique*," OC 66 (1982) 240-241.

⁴⁰ M. D. FINDIKYAN, *The Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office by Bishop Step'anos Siwnec'i (+ 735): Critical Edition and Translation with Textual and Liturgical Analysis*, OCA 270 (2004) 458.

⁴¹ "Those (deacons) on duty remain and they ascend (the Bema and say) the *qanonâ* 'Holy' which is the completion of (this part of the service) of the Mysteries. Thus far they typified only the service of the dispensation, but now the dispensation is completed." *A Commentary on the Mass (which has been attributed to, but it is not really) by the Nestorian George, Bishop of Mosul and Arbel (10th century)*, R. H. Connolly (tr.), R. MATHEUS (ed.), Kottayam 2000 36.

⁴² *Die Rechtssammlung des Gabriel von Basra und ihr Verhältnis zu den juristischen Sammelwerken der Nestorianer*, H. KAUFHOLD (ed.), Berlin 1976, Syriac text 226-227.

deacon at Bema ("lift up your voices and glorify the living God, O all people") echoes the command of the holy angels to sing after them according to the legendary origin of this hymn. Here is a late eighth century testimony:

The fact that the deacon commands 'lift up your voice and glorify all (the people)', just as this *qanonâ* was heard from the angels, the same way this corporeal angel (deacon) always awakes and commands the people on everything to be done, and also now completes the series of his service; in honour of our Lord now he does not descend from the Bema so as to show that our Lord remained in Jerusalem until his ascension. As soon as this *qanonâ* is concluded, the service of *Ramšâ* is finished.⁴³

The deacon's proclamation brings to our mind the function of heavenly beings

(angels and saints): they continually praise their Creator and invite mankind to join in their incessant praise. Angels have the divine gifts of "reason and freedom" in a higher level than man, and in this sense they are superior to man.⁴⁴ Since liturgy is an act of reason and freedom, angels are perfect models for worship. For this reason they have a pedagogic role in Revelation and in liturgy. Man imitate and replicate many angelic hymns in liturgical singing. Hence, the best way to commence any earthly liturgy is by reproducing the angelic praises. Most of the liturgical poetry is inspired directly by the angelic revelations in the Scripture. Trisagion is a heavenly catechesis for men, teaching us on the divine Nature and our liturgical function in relation to the cosmos. In short, heaven and earth join in one accord to praise their Creator in Trisagion.

⁴³ *Anonymi auctoris Expositio officiorum ecclesiae, op. cit., I:188,3-11.*

⁴⁴ Cf. R. M. M. TUSCHLING, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian*, (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 40) Tübingen 2007.

Mar Ephrem: Martyr and Singer of the Word

Monk Lorenzo

Reading the hymns and writings of Ephrem one cannot be but fascinated by his relation with the Holy Scripture, which is relation with the Logos hidden in every word and event of the Old and New Testament:

Since the King was hidden in Judah, Tamar stole Him from his loins;

today shone forth the splendour of the beauty whose hidden form she loved.¹

Rut lay down with Boaz because she saw hidden in him the medicine of life. [...]

Blessed is the True One Who comes from the True Father.

He fulfilled the words of the true [prophets], and they are complete in their truth.

From Your treasury, my Lord, let us fetch from the treasures of Your Scriptures *the names of the just men of old who said they saw Your coming.*²

In this same hymn on Nativity, Ephrem draws our attention - through an array of testimonies - to the splendour of the Scriptures, in which shine the same splendour of the incarnate Verb, reflection of the Father's glory and exact imprint of God's very being:³

Lot saw the Sodomites who perverted nature: he looked for the Lord of natures who gave chastity⁴ beyond nature.⁵

And again:

Moses and Elijah looked for him; the humble one ascended from the depth, and the zealous one came down from the height, and they saw the Son in the middle.⁶ They represented a symbol of His coming: Moses was a type for the dead, and Elijah a type for the living who will fly to meet Him when He comes.⁷

¹ Gen 38,12- 19; Mt1,3.

² *HNat* 1,12-13.19-20.

³ Cf. Heb 1,3.

⁴ litt. *Holiness*.

⁵ *HNat* 1,26.

⁶ Mk 9,2-8

⁷ *HNat* 1,35-36.

Ephrem swims in the Scriptures seduced by the Verb there sacramentally hidden. Enjoying by faith this divine presence he can penetrate the mystery of the Holy Pages:

In her virginity Eve put on leaves of shame.

Your mother put on, in her virginity, the garment of glory that suffices for all.[...] Blessed is the woman in whose heart and mind You are.⁸

She is the King's castle for You, the High Priest. [...]

On the other hand, Eve became a cave and grave for the accursed serpent, for his evil counsel entered and dwelt in her; she who became dust became bread for him.

[But] You are our bread, and You are our bridal chamber, and the robe of glory.⁹

Eve did not keep the Word and 'put on leaves of shame', becoming 'a cave and grave for the accursed serpent'; the Virgin Mother kept the Word in her heart and mind and 'put on the garment of glory.' Soon after Ephrem remarks: '[But] You are our bread and You are our bridal chamber and the robe of our glory.' It is a statement

which points out to the life of the Bride of the incarnate Verb, the very life of Ephrem who takes delight day and night in the bread of life and, clothed with the robe of glory, experiences the Trinitarian love in the bridal chamber.

Let us hear another text from the *Hymns on Nativity* which shows how the eyes of Ephrem are the eyes of the Dove penetrating the depth of the Scriptures:

Because of You Sarah was jealous, which was not her custom.

She was not jealous of the boy's mother, where even the chaste women are jealous; she was jealous of the slave because of You, o Free born Son! [...]

Son of the King, Sarah loved You, but she hated the king,¹⁰

nor was the palace pleasing to her when she walked about with the exile.¹¹

She was inclined to him for she saw Your manifestation hidden in him.

Ninety years¹² were not too wearisome for her to wait for You.¹³

No doubt, Ephrem – helped also by the Hebrew tradition – contemplates in Sarah the splendour of the glory of the Lamb's virginity which fascinates the Egyptians¹⁴ and the Philistines.¹⁵

⁸ Cf. Lk 2,19.51; 11,27-28.

⁹ *HNat* 17,4-6.

¹⁰ Faraoh; cf. Gen 12,10-20.

¹¹ Abraham.

¹² Gen 17,17.

¹³ *HNat* 20,1.4-5.

¹⁴ Gen 12,14

¹⁵ Gen 26,7. Cf. Abba Orfeo Povero, *Appunti di Pentecoste*, Jerusalem 1976; Italian text with Portuguese, English and Malayalam translation forthcoming in Udhanaashram Editions.

Now let us turn our attention to the fifth hymn on Paradise. Ephrem begins it contemplating the Word, the Lovgo", soul of the world and of the history of Israel:

I consider the Word of the Creator,¹⁶
and likened it to the rock that marched
with the people of Israel in the wilderness;¹⁷
it was not from the reservoir of water
contained within it
that it poured forth for them glorious
streams:
there was no water in the rock, yet oceans
sprang from it;
*just so did the Word fashion created things
out of nothing.*¹⁸

The Word, the Logos, is the One who
with his presence gives life to the letters and
the lines of the book of Genesis:

I read the opening of this book and was
filled with joy,
for its verses and lines spread out their arms
to welcome me;
the first rushed out and kissed me and led

me on to its companion;
and when I reached that verse wherein is
written the story of paradise,
it lifted me up and transported me
*from the bosom of the book to the very bosom
of Paradise.*¹⁹

The joy and spiritual excitement
which Ephrem shares with us in this hymn
are the fruit of years of immersion in the
Scriptures through liturgical and personal
prayer, unceasing pondering in the heart -
with faith and love - the divine Word,
together with practice of fraternal love²⁰ and
fasting. In all this Ephrem is a true son of
the early Syrian Church deeply rooted in
the Scriptures and in the Semitic biblical
humus.

For Ephrem, in Gods' Word is
contained all sort of knowledge and
wisdom:

Let my mouth have your teaching, my
Lord, as a merchant [has] a capital,
*for on [Your teaching] depend all form of
wisdom.*²¹

¹⁶ From the translation of S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood, 1990; R. Lovenant, in *Sources chrétienne* 137, gives a different translation of this line: "Je contemplai alors le Verbe Createur et je Le compaire au Rocher ..." Both translations are allowed by the Syriac text: 0ywrbd ht1mB..

¹⁷ 1 Cor 10,4.

¹⁸ HPar 5,1.

¹⁹ HPar 5,3.

²⁰ Ephrem along all his life consumed himself in the fatigue of serving. We know already in Palladius' *Lausiaca History*, chapter 40 (dating from 419/20) about the famine that took place at Edessa shortly before the death of Ephrem. During this famine our holy Father played a major role in organizing relief for the poor. He will have been approaching the age of seventy at that time.

²¹ HVirg 4,2.

It is the Word hidden in the Scriptures who grants wisdom and makes the eyes luminous, able to penetrate also the mystery of the book of Nature:

The keys of doctrine, which unlock all the Scripture's books,

*have opened up before my eyes the book of creation.*²²

Only enlightened by Scripture, the Nature bears witness to the Creator together with the Scripture²³ and becomes the third harp which is a witness to the Old and New Testaments, the two harps which the incarnate Word plays with His right and left hand:

The Word of the Most High came down and put on a weak body with hands and he took two harps in His right and left hands.

The third He set up before Himself to be a witness to the [other] two, for the middle harp taught that the Lord is playing them.

He played, and the third harp *was armonious and completed the [other] two.*²⁴

[...]

But who has seen our Lord and admired his playing on three harps?

He blend their counterpoint wisely lest their hearers be alienated: signs, symbols and prototypes, so that Nature and Scripture may convince. With the one creation He bound together two Testaments *to put the doubters to shame.*²⁵

Ephrem in his *Commentary on Diatessaron* writes:

*God depicted His word with many beauties [...]. And God has hidden within His word all sort of treasures, so that each one of us can be enriched by it from whatever aspects he meditates on. For God's word is the Tree of Life which proffers to you on all sides blessed fruits; it is like the Rock which was struck in the wilderness, which became a spiritual drink for every one on all sides: 'They ate the food of the Spirit and they drunk the draft of the Spirit.'*²⁶

And in the *Letter to Publius* he affirms:

The Gospel is but a figure of the beauty that is above [...]. There the Kingdom of heaven is depicted, visible to those who have a luminous eye; ...There Paradise is visible, joyous

*with its flowers. In that mirror Gehenna, too, is visible, all fiery, ready for those who deserve to live there...*²⁷

²² HPar 6,1

²³ Cfr. HPar 5,2; HAzym 4,24; HFaith 35,1;45, 1; HVirg 1,3-5; 8,3; etc.

²⁴ HVirg 29,1-2

²⁵ HVirg 30,1

²⁶ Cf. 1Cor 10,4; *Commentary Diat* 1,18.

²⁷ *Letter to Publius*,1-2.

Our Father Ephrem in his writings frequently describes God's Word, the Scriptures, as a mirror:²⁸

The Scriptures are placed there like a mirror: he whose eye is luminous
*beholds there the image of reality.*²⁹

In the *Hymns on Fasting* Mar Ephrem gives us very precious insights and shows us the way to receive from God the gift of the luminous eye, which can "behold the image of reality" in the Scriptures:

Fasting is the teacher who teaches the athlete how to fight.

Come to it and learn the clever fight!

It prescribes that our mouth fasts and also our heart.

Let us not abstain from bread while we think thoughts

in which the poison of death is concealed!

Let us through fasting thank the First Born who gave us the word of life to meditate on it.³⁰ [...]

Take away deceit from your fasting, remove your mockery from psalms,
*wash clean your songs, your mouth from lies.*³¹

See fasting that sets free! It frees the divers from the yoke of greed.

For the domination of the stomach is tiring and torturing

and does not fit in with freedom.

Take away from the stomach the service rendered to it

and serve the spirit with living words!

Your lap is then full of the teaching, the nourishment of the soul!

Let us offer praise to the First Born whose flock busies itself with Scriptures, the highly praised meadow. [...]

Scorn, you proud women, through the fasting,

adornment and luxury which blooms like a flower.

Ester possessed royal jewels. Still, because she understood

that it was only earthly, she hurried to fast.

And fasting brought down and gave her heavenly beauty and spiritual splendour.

Armed with that she came and requested from the king

the life of those set apart for death.

Praised be the King, who has decorated the holy church

*with fasting, prayer and wakeful watching*³²

Lent Season with its many Scripture readings, offer, to those who are willing to listen, divine treasures, through which may be restored the luminous eye of the mind, blinded by the misuse of the free will.

In the midst of the Fast the Scriptures gathered like merchants,

²⁸ HArm 6,43; HFast 1,7; HomOL, 5; Letter to Publius 1-2; HFaith 67,8; etc.

²⁹ means "truth, reality." HFaith 67,8.

³⁰ It is the verb: *to meditate, to murmur, to brood over, to study.* The same verb is found in Ps 1,2.

³¹ HFast 1,6.9.

³² HFast 4,3.7.

having in their possession a veritable treasure house of divinity.
 With that holy voice as the key
 they are opened up before those who listen.
 Blessed is the King who opened up His treasury to His people in need. [...] Open up, my brethren, and take from it with discernment,
 for this treasure house is the common property of everyone,
 and each person, as if he were treasurer, possesses his own key;
 Who can now fail to get rich?
 Blessed is He who has removed the cause of our low estate. [...] O Jesus who opened the eyes of Bartimaeus,³³
 You opened his eyes that has become blind against his will, [...] But with us please spit on our faces, Lord, *and open the eyes which our own free will has closed.*³⁴

In the 9th hymn on Fast again Ephrem sings:

Let us observe their fasting [of Daniel and his companions]
 that became the key which opened
 the great treasure house³⁵ of the Holy Spirit.

He [Daniel] opened and took from it the revelation of the dream,
*its interpretation and explanation.*³⁶

Within the context of his own Church, faithful to the Scriptures and to the apostolic Tradition, Ephrem experiences the return of Adam to the Paradise of delight, through a patient ascetical labour of renunciation of that food which caused the loss of the garment of glory and manducation of those living words which are "Spirit and life." (Jn 6,63) Also the fact that Ephrem penetrates so deeply into the mystery of the eucharistic body and blood of Christ is a consequence of his having eaten with faith and ardour the bread of life, the incarnate Word, present in the Scriptures.³⁷

It is true that we have scanty biographical data from Ephrem's writings, nevertheless the melodies of this 'Harp of the Holy Spirit', attentively listened to, make us enter the inner chamber of his heart and know much about him. How not to perceive Ephrem's own experience of loving relation with the Lord, His Word,³⁸ His divine

³³ Mc 10,46.

³⁴ HFast 6,1.3.5-6.

³⁵ According to HFast 6,1.3, the 'treasure house' is the Scripture. See also HNat 1,20.

³⁶ HFast 9,10.

³⁷ There are several texts in which Ephrem manifests his faith in the sacramental power of God's Word, power which accomplishes the very sacraments: CDiat 5,15; 11,21; 12,1-4; etc.

³⁸ Regarding the relation of Ephrem with God's word – which, for him, was always relation with Christ the Logos –, let us gaze at one of the jewels we find in his *madrashe*: "May the heart endure to be

Mysteries and with the book of Nature, in his writings and in the many descriptions of our holy fathers and mothers put under our eyes in his hymns?

In the 10th hymn on Fast he writes:

Behold the Nissan of fasting on the mountain peak!

Moses climbed up and enjoyed and thrived.
For fasting became for him a meal
and prayer the source of living water.
A man with insight (was he),³⁹
and his fasting was one of atonement.⁴⁰

When Ephrem asserts that fasting became for him a meal and prayer the source of living water, are we not allowed to behold the long and luminous fasts of our holy Father, during which he was meditating and murmuring the Word of life, a real food and source of living water for him?

The luminous eye of Ephrem has profoundly penetrated the mystery of the Father's Word present in all the Scriptures,⁴¹ of the Lamb who fulfils the Sacred Pages

and their symbols (Azr, mysteries, types). It is really amazing to observe how our Father depicts and believes in the unity of the two Testaments⁴² and how he succeeds – by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – to illumine the paschal mystery of Christ through the Old Testament:

*The corpse of Elisha rose a dead man, a figure of the One who, through his death, opened the tombs and pulled out the dead who were blaming their killers. The bones of Elisha mocked the same people who scoffed at the Lord: 'He saved others, He cannot save himself!'; because the bones of Elisha rose others, but did not rise themselves.*⁴³

Since Ephrem – by the Spirit “who uttered, through the prophets and the Apostles, the Scriptures”⁴⁴ – had the daily experience of the Logos who speaks in the Old and New Testaments, is most sensitive to the mystery of the Risen Christ's voice resounding in all the Sacred Texts:

*Death finished his taunting speech
and our Lord's voice rang out thunderously*

crucified all day long, and instead of nails may the commandments be implanted in it. [...] At that time they hung You to the wood, O Lord. May today each one allow to be hung to Love: instead of nails let [it] be fasts, and instead of thorns, commandments.” (HCh 29,8.13)

³⁹ In Syriac means “separation, discernement, decision, offering, bread for the Eucharist.” D. Cerbeland (Bellefontaine 1997, p. 90) translates: ‘Homme consacré’.

⁴⁰ HFast 10,3.

⁴¹ HAzym 4,23: “Behold the prophets as servants, hold high the icons of Christ, the Almighty King.” Cf. HFaith 54,8; HResur 3,17; CDiat 20,3.33-35.

⁴² HFaith 35,2.9; 52.10; 56,8; 60,5-6; 70,12-13; HVirg 9,2-3.15; 37,7.10; HCh 44,4-5.

⁴³ CDiat 20,33.

⁴⁴ HFaith 60,6.

*in Sheol, tearing open each grave one by one.*⁴⁵

In the Nisibene hymn 37, death itself speaks:

I saw in the valley Ezekiel giving life to the dead.

When the order had been given, I saw the bones that

were in heaps and they moved.

There was a tumult of bones in Sheol, bone seeking for his fellow and joint for her mate.

There was there none that questioned or that was questioned, whether those bones lived.

Unquestioned, the voice of Jesus, *the Master of all creation, gives life.*⁴⁶

Death continues her mourning:

I shall remain alone.

How shall I bear to see Sheol empty, because the voice which has rent the graves, makes her desolate

*and send forth the dead that were in her midst.*⁴⁷

The voice emptying the tombs is the voice of the Risen Christ, hidden in the words which the prophet Ezekiel⁴⁸ proclaimed in obedience to the same God's

Word.

Going towards the conclusion, we may recall what Ephrem wrote in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron* regarding the listening or not of God's Word:

Death entered through the ear of Eve;
*for that Life entered through the ear of Mary.*⁴⁹

And also in the *Hymns on Virginity*:

Mary, the thirsty land in Nazareth,
Conceived our Lord by her ear.

You too, o woman,⁵⁰ thirsty for water,
conceived the Son by your hearing.

Blessed are your ears that drank the source
that gave drink to the world.

Mary planted Him in the manger,

But you [planted Him] in the ears of His hearers.⁵¹

As the tragedy of Adam and Eve was caused by not treasuring in their heart God's Word and by listening the voice of the serpent – and then misusing the free will –, so the drama within the history of humankind and the Churches depends on the same cause. Satan knows this well and he is very cunning on laying traps accordingly. In one of the Nisibene Hymns, Satan himself states:

⁴⁵ *HNis* 36,11.

⁴⁶ *HNis* 37,5.

⁴⁷ *HNis* 37,8.

⁴⁸ Regarding the mystery of the prophets' word, *HVirg* 49,21 sings: 'Johna's voice became a medicine of life. He sowed death with it, but life sprouted.'

⁴⁹ *CDiat* 20,32; Cf *HCh* 35,18; 49,7.

⁵⁰ The Samaritan woman, cf. Jo 4.

⁵¹ *HVirg* 23,5.

Instead of using a chain, I have bound men
with sloth, and they have sat down idle.
Thus I have deprived their senses from
doing anything good,
their eyes from reading,
their mouth from singing praise,
their minds from learning.
How keen they are for barren and useless
tales,
at empty talk they excel.
But should the word of life be mentioned
in their presence,
either they will drive it out, or get up and
go.⁵²

In another stanza from the *Hymns on Faith*, Ephrem attests:

Who would not marvel that everyone
believes in the book of medicines
which the healer reads and reads aloud and
teaches us
so that we will trust his sayings and consent
to his medicines,
without judgement or questioning,
but the books of God are not capable of
persuading [us]
about His Son Who is His Begotten?⁵³

These texts are revealing our wounds,
the wounds of the Church, our lack of
faith, devotion and affection towards the
Word of Life contained in the Scriptures.

For our Holy Fathers, the Scriptures – received from the apostolic Tradition and from the hands of the Church⁵⁴ – were the only source for theology, the “furnace” of theology, to use an expression of St. Ephrem, a furnace where the “names and distinctions” of God found in the same Scripture “should be examined in the midst of the crucibles of God.”⁵⁵ Once we do not remain within this divine furnace and pass over the boundary of the Scriptures, we are doomed to death, like fish without water.

Since the Scriptures are the tabernacle of the Logos, filled with His glory and His peace, if we refuse to believe in the One hidden in them, we will be condemned to a life of exile, quarrel, division, without rest and peace. Regarding the link between Scripture and peace, let us turn to some lines from the *Hymns on Faith*:

*The Scriptures are full of peace
but the learned [are filled] with
disturbance.*⁵⁶

The Scriptures are full of peace,
but those people are full of anger.
Their disputation makes them old.
Their foulness consumes them.⁵⁷
The Scriptures are at peace,

⁵² HNis 41,5.

⁵³ HFaith 56,12.

⁵⁴ In HResur 4,7 Ephrem affirms that the bee is the mirror of the Church “who gather in the Scriptures the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.” Cf. also HNat 28,9-10.

⁵⁵ HFaith 44,1.

⁵⁶ HFaith 53,7.

⁵⁷ HFaith 56,8.

but human beings are divided,
because there have been controversies about
the one Truth. [...]

Brothers shot arrows at [their] brothers: a
great sorrow!

[...] Empty pride disturbs the disputers...⁵⁸

The heavens are full of peace,

But the sword is in the Churches. [...]

Our Lord, make peace in my days in Your
Churches. [...]

Let there be one true Church in all times
and let her righteous children be gathered
in her bosom

so that they may confess Your goodness.

Praise to Your reconciliation! ⁵⁹

In the dramatic situation of his
time, Ephrem does not lose confidence in
God's providence, but invokes that Lord
who hides the mysteries "from the wise and
the learned and reveals them to the babies".⁶⁰

Lord protect my simplicity
from the wise who are very foolish.

If they knew Your Greatness
they would not assail [You] with an
investigation.

If they joined Nature to Scripture
they might learn the Lord of both from
them both.

[...]

Make me drink from the clear well of the
Scriptures

by means of a pure pastor ^{61, 62}

CONCLUSION

In the *Hymns on Virginity*, Ephrem
turns to the Virgin Mary:

Since you missed the sound of His voice⁶³,
He gave you his harp⁶⁴

to be a consolation to you.⁶⁵

We may affirm, without fear to go
wrong, that the Lord Jesus has given us
Ephrem – within the choir of the heavenly
Jerusalem – as the harp played by His Spirit,
in order that we may re-enter the Paradise
of the Scriptures and, hearing there the
murmur of God's voice, be consoled and
find healing for our numerous wounds.

Reading and rereading Ephrem –
supported by his intercession from the
bosom of the Eternal Love – one cannot
but feel the sweetness of his paternity which
walks by our side, illumining and consoling
us in the fatigue and drama of the history
and of our paschal journey. His writings
are indeed a treasure which helps the Bride
of the Lamb to go and meet the
Bridegroom coming at midnight. His

⁵⁸ *HFaith* 68,1.5.8.

⁵⁹ *HFaith* 52,5.15.

⁶⁰ Mt 11,25.

⁶¹ In Syriac, 'pastor', is the bishop here. means "pure, luminous, serene, sincere, single-minded."

⁶² *HFaith* 35,10.

⁶³ The voice of her Son, the Father's Word.

⁶⁴ John, the beloved disciple.

⁶⁵ *HVirg* 25,3.

hymns are filled with exhortations like the following one:

O son of a servant,
make the Scriptures your wings
so that you can reach your Lord's Son.⁶⁶

It is now time to praise the Lord and in front of Him to declare blessed the tongue of our father Ephrem with his own words:

Blessed is he whose harp sings
the songs that David sang. [...]
Blessed, O my Lord, is he
whose tongue serves You as a lyre
and he sings with it songs
that can heal those who listen to him. [...]
Blessed is he
whose word is like the medicine of life
and who gives life to the talkative dead,
who behave arrogantly toward Him who
gives life to all. [...]
Blessed, O my Lord, is he
whose tongue is a clean vessel
and who speak with it

the truth which flows from the prophets and apostles.⁶⁷

Ephrem is truly a martyr and singer of the glory of the Logos; a martyr who, like John the Baptist, longs to diminish so that the Verb of the Father may increase in us, the Bride.

Our holy Father is a martyr and singer moved only by Love:

It is Love who stirs up my feebleness to sing in front of Your majesty. [...]

*Out of love for You my harp became bold: play it, Lord, as You are used to do!*⁶⁸

This Love working in Ephrem, immerses him into an abyss of humility:⁶⁹

Poor is my harp: may Your gift sing on it!
Enrich it with sweet melodies of a sermon of praise,
so that I may offer on my harp an offering of words.
I shall sing for You from what is Yours.

⁶⁶ *HFaith* 75,22.

⁶⁷ *HFaith* 2,9.15.19.23.

⁶⁸ *HCh* 9,1.2.

⁶⁹ At the end humilty, the humility of the Good Thief, will absolve also the Saints.

⁶⁹ *HCh* 30,10.

TEXTS OF SAINT EPHREM QUOTED IN THIS PAPER

1. PROSE WORKS

CDiat = Commentary on the Diatessaron, CSCO 137,145; L. Leloir, *Saint Ephrem, Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Folios additionels*, Leuven, 1990. French translation by L. Leloir in *Sources chrétienne* 121.

2. ARTISTIC PROSE

HomOL = Homily on Our Lord, CSCO 270-1. English t. by E. G. Mathews & J.P. Amar, in *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, Washington, 1994.

Letter to Publius: Syriac text with English t. published by S. Brock in *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), p. 261-305. Another English t. is given in *Selected Prose Works*, p.335-55.

3. HYMNS (MADRASHE)

HArm = Hymns preserved only in Armenian, PO 30 (fifty one hymns with Latin t.); English t. of hymn 49 by S. Brock in *Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, Studies Supplementary to Sobornost, 4, London, 1983; French t. of hymns 2-7 and 9 by F. Graffin in *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961).

HAzym = Hymns on Unleavened Bread, CSCO 248; French t. by D. Cerbelaud in *Ephrem, Celebrons la Pâque*, Paris 1995 & by F. Cassingena-Trévedy in *Sources chrétienne* 502, Paris 2006.

HCh = Hymns on the Church, CSCO 198; French t. by D. Cerbelaud, *Éphrem le Syrien. Le combat Chrétien. Hymnes de Ecclesia*, Bégrolles-en-Mauge 2004.

HFaith = Hymns on Faith, CSCO 154; English t. by P.S. Russel, 1995 (unpublished).

HFast = Hymns on the Fast, CSCO 246; English t. of all the hymns by Celine Mathew in *Saint Ephrem's Hymns on Fasting*, SEERI, 2006; English t. of hymn no. 6 by S. Brock in *Harp of the Spirit*, 1983.

HNat = Hymns on the Nativity, CSCO 186; English t. by K. MacVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, New York, 1989.

HNis = Hymns on Nisibis, CSCO 218, 240; English t. by J. Gwynn of hymns nos 1-21, 35-42, and 52-68 in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series two, vol. 13, Oxford/New York, 1898. French t. of all the hymns by P. Phégali & de C. Navarre in *Saint Éphrem, Les Chants de Nisibe*, Paris 1989.

HPar = Hymns on Paradise, CSCO 174; English t. by S. Brock, in *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood NY, 1990; French t. by R. Lavenant and F. Graffin in *Éphrem de Nisibe. Hymns sur le Paradis*, *Sources chrétienne* 137, Paris 1968.

HResur = Hymns on the Resurrection, CSCO 248; French t. by D. Cerbelaud in *Ephrem, Celebrons la Pâque*, Paris 1995 & by F. Cassingena-Trévedy in *Sources chrétienne* 502.

HVirg = Hymns on Virginity: CSCO 223; English t. by K. MacVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, New York, 1989.

Catholicity of the Church

Explanations and Interpretations in the Light of Lumen Gentium

Dr. Thomas Puthukulangara

PART - I

In the Apostles' Creed the Christians profess their belief in 'the holy catholic Church'. In the liturgy, when we profess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, we say, "We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church". Since the very founding of the Church, these four attributes have been believed as her identification marks which reflect her essential features and mission. In other words, these four marks are necessary for a Church to be what she must be. Considering the history of the growth of Christian theology we can see that these four marks have had a prominent role in the enrichment of ecclesiology. The primary theme and central concern of our study is one of these identification marks of the Church, catholicity. For a better understanding of the theme it becomes indispensable to consider some etymological and historical backgrounds of the term. So before going to the Vatican II's approach to catholicity we shall have a concise look on the history of catholicity.

I. Meaning and Significance of the Term 'Catholicity'

1. Origin of the Term

Of the four marks attributed to the Church in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the term 'catholic' is the unique one not present neither in the Septuagint nor in the New Testament. At the same time the word appeared very early in the language of faith and Christian theological reflections and so it became a part of the profession of faith. Therefore it is sound to open our study of catholicity starting from the original Christian use of the term to pick its biblical ascendance and to go through the history of the concept thus to verify its ecclesiastical use and its vast implications.

The word 'catholic' is a transliteration of the Greek adverb *kath'olon* and the relative adjective *katholikós*, with a wide range of meanings such as: ordained to or towards all; pertaining to the whole or universal, general, total, complete, perfect,

altogether, as a whole, etc¹. The term is present in classical Greek literature and as indicated by its etymology in the Greek language, catholicity is primarily a matter of wholeness. To affirm that the Church is catholic is therefore to say that she is destined by God to embrace the whole humanity.

Applied to the Church, the term was first of all used by St Ignatius of Antioch. "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church"². A. de Halleux opines that from the numerous interpretations given to this text, the most probable sense would be this: St Ignatius is distinguishing the local Eucharistic assembly from the Church 'taken as a whole', 'in its entirety'³. According to Y. Congar the expression 'catholic Church' intends not only the totality but also the truth and authenticity⁴. Then in the second century in the introduction of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, we find this passage, "The Church of God dwelling as a pilgrim at Smyrna to the Church of God in pilgrimage at Philomelium, and to all the congregations

of the Holy and Catholic Church in every place. May the mercy and peace and love of God the Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ be multiplied"⁵.

The meaning of 'catholic' in these two ancient texts is not completely clear and has various interpretations. Some scholars see the term emphasizing purity and authenticity of the 'Christian faith while some others its extension and comprehensiveness. Anyhow from the second century onwards the meaning 'true' Church often appeared in the Christian writings. Let us see how the concept got immersed in the later Christian theology.

2. A Brief Historical Background of the Concept of Catholicity and its Significance

The persistence of a duality in the interpretations shows that catholicity's understanding cannot be focused on one excluding the other. Furthermore, in the beginning of third century, the concept assumed a polemic shade also. 'Catholic' is the Church, 'non Catholics' are the heretics. The Church Fathers such as Clement of

¹ Cf. G. W. H. LAMPE (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1978, 690-691.

² IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 8, in A. ROBERTS – J. DONALDSON (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, Massachusetts 2004⁴, 90.

³ Cf. A. DE HALLEUX, *L'Église catholique dans la lettre ignacienne aux Smyrniotes*, in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 58 (1982) 5-24.

⁴ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche*, in J. FEINER – M. LÖHRER (Hrsg.), *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss Heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik: das Heilsgeschehen in der Gemeinde*, Bd. IV/I, Benziger Verlag, Einsiedeln/Zürich/Köln 1972, 479.

⁵ *Introductory Note to the Epistle Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in A. ROBERTS – J. DONALDSON (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 37.

Alexandria, Tertullian and others used the expression *catholic Church* to denote the true Church in the world, or a local community in communion with her. In the fourth century the attribute *catholic* appeared very frequently in the Symbols of faith: for example, that of Cyril of Jerusalem (343), St Ephifanius (347), and finally after the great Councils of the fourth century, in the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Symbol (381). So a common aspect that the expression 'catholic' obtained from the end of the second century onwards is, together with the meaning of totality it expresses an element of truth (orthodoxy) and authenticity opposed to all heretical and schismatic groups.

Although the two values had never ceased to coexist, because of some historical circumstances of the beginning centuries (heresies), the quantitative aspect got more attention especially in St Augustine. He considered the *catholic Church* as the Church which realizes in herself the wholeness (original ecclesiological significance), which is contemporarily orthodox (qualitative catholicity), which is diffused all over the world and is numerically the greatest (quantitative catholicity). Isidor of Siviglia had given a brief description to catholicity. "The

Church is catholic and universal, almost *kath'holon*, that is, according to the whole. In fact, she is not reduced especially like the churches of heretics in certain regions, instead spread throughout the whole world"⁶. Vincent of Lérins had depicted catholicity in the sense of orthodoxy, as that which is believed everywhere, always and by all⁷. Even though the term as such is absent in the Scripture, the Church Fathers gave an outstanding position to the concept of catholicity in their writings.

In the scholastic period we see that the concept of catholicity is identified with the universality of faith (*fides catholica*). It is observed that the great scholastics such as Albert the Great, St Thomas Aquinas etc. had underlined the qualitative value of catholicity. In the medieval times all the aspects of catholicity underlined by the Fathers of the Church were kept by the theologians of the time in a context of Christ centred vision: catholic is the one who professes the universality of faith (orthodoxy) and the universal destination of salvation brought by Christ. Thus catholicity is already present in the profound essence of the Church before it appears as an external factor of her life.

In the reformation period, there was a change from the idea of *Ecclesia universalis*

⁶ ISIDOR OF SIVIGLIA, *Originum, seu Etymologiarum libri VIII.1.1*, in J. O. RETA - M. M. CASQUERO (editan), *San Isidoro de Sevilla. Etimologías: edición bilingüe*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 2004, 676.

⁷ Cf. VINCENT OF LÉRINS, *A Commonitory*, II, 6, in P. SCHAFF - H. WACE (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 11, Hendrickson Publishers, Massachusetts 2004⁴, 132.

to a narrow ecclesiological concept of catholicity. In the apologetics and inter-confessional polemics, quantitative aspect of catholicity was insisted much more while the qualitative sense fell in shade. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a great crisis of catholicity because of the multiple divisions occurred in the Church.

So in terms of its early development the term 'catholic' as applied to the Church went through three stages of meaning. In the first stage it refers to totality and authenticity of the Church. It represents the 'true' Church. In the second stage it denotes a Church which is orthodox in her theology. 'Catholicism' is contrasted with 'schism' and 'heresy'. At the same time the quantitative aspect also got much importance. And finally in the third stage the quantitative aspect got prevailed over the qualitative one and it indicates a Church which extends throughout the world. The term thus came to possess a geographical reference.

3. Efforts to Bring Back and Re-interpret the Meanings of Catholicity

From the Reformation period till the first half of the twentieth century one distinguishes many changes regarding the concept of catholicity. It is evaluated that, for the Greek Orthodox theologians, catholicity meant adherence to the full apostolic heritage as expressed in the great Councils and Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries. In the Roman Catholicism (of the Counter-Reformation and neo-Scholasticism) catholicity was understood as wide geographical extension combined with

manifest unity under a single governing authority. For the Catholics of the Tübingen School and for the Anglicans of the Oxford movement catholicity meant incarnational and sacramental religion, in which divine life was mediated by the living Church. And finally, for the liberal Protestants, Catholic Christianity meant legalistic religion in which divine authority was falsely claimed for human ecclesiastical regulations.

But in the last few decades, the civilization has become increasingly pluralistic and intercultural; all traditions are threatened by the acceleration of social change; the technology developed; attention is focused more on the future than on the past; and the importance of religion which aims at an otherworldly life becomes less important. In such a situation each of the conceptions of catholicity finds itself called into question. So it became an urgent need to re-interpret the catholicity of the Church in the light of the changed situation.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, in concurrence with the rising of ecumenical movement, there was a discreet re-capture of the fundamental and qualitative aspect of the properties of catholicity with a policy of less apologetics and more ecclesiology. In the year 1937-38 two great works were published regarding the new dimensions of catholicity for a re-thinking of the concept. One was Y. Congar's *Chrétiens désunis* (1937) which indicated the necessity to go beyond the quantitative concept of catholicity by that

of qualitative, founded on the fullness of the grace of Christ. The other one was De Lubac's *Catholicisme* (1938) written on the basis of patristic tradition affirming that the catholicity of the Church is a quality that she possessed from the very moment of her existence. In the opening year of the Vatican II appeared J. Hamer's *L'Église est une communion* (1962) with a new perspective on catholicity, communion. In the same direction but more systematic was the work of card. Charles Journet: *L'Église du Verbe Incarné* (1949-1969) where catholicity was given a sacramental dimension, founded explicitly on the opera of Holy Spirit.

It is in this particular historical context that the Pope John XXIII summoned the Second Vatican Council with the intention of *aggiornamento* (bringing up-to-date) of the Church. And it became a turning point in the life of the Church, justly defined as, "a Council of the Church on the Church" that has marked "a new epoch for the Church", an unprecedented venture in ecclesiological self-examination and self-understanding. One of the main questions to be answered was in what language can the Church best gains a hearing for her message in a pluralistic society? So the Council Fathers in order to initiate the *aggiornamento* of the whole life of the Church constitutes two pillars: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, which looks at the Church in itself, exploring her mystery, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, which considers the role of the Church in the modern world.

The Council's rediscovery of the patristic sense of the Church's catholicity is evident in a number of Council documents. At the heart of the Council was a reaffirmation of the catholicity of the Church as something more than geographic expansion. Our task here is to examine the meanings of catholicity in the teachings of the Vatican II and we do it mainly basing on, *Lumen gentium*. Even though the Council's teachings on the subjects such as primacy, collegiality, ministry, laity, religious freedom, liturgy, and the Church's relationship with the modern world are pertinent to our topic, we limit our study to indicate what *Lumen gentium* has to say on the specific point of catholicity.

II. Theology of Catholicity in *Lumen Gentium*

A reader who expects a classical presentation of the mystery of the Church based on the four notes of the Church: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity would be amazed of not finding them as such in *Lumen gentium*. But still one could see that they are treated appropriately in the whole document. Thus the first chapter "The Mystery of the Church" exposes predominantly the unity of the Church, especially when it speaks of the mystical body. The following chapter emphasizes that this 'one' Church is catholic; not an abstracted one, but an open and a wide spread community which is extending continuously. An exposition of apostolicity can be noted where the Constitution speaks of hierarchical structure and ministers,

while the rest of the chapters are dedicated to the Church's holiness⁸. Given that the four marks of the Church are closely interrelated it would be very artificial if they are separated radically, for they keep an inner equilibrium among them.

From what we have said it is evident that the second chapter of the Constitution concerning the *people of God* is the central point of our study. Here the thirteenth article holds a vital position, 'the heart and centre of the chapter', which unites two complimentary parts of the chapter, articles 9-12 and 14-17 respectively, treating the same theme of catholicity of the Church from two different points of view. So our study is focused on this thirteenth article where we can examine a deep understanding of different meanings of the concept, remained in shadow for centuries and now recovered in the light of a changed ecclesiological horizon and we see how the whole chapter is interrelated in explaining the catholicity of the Church.

1. Trinitarian Foundation of Catholicity

J. Markey reminds that, "The triune life of God and God's reign serve as the

context for any discussion of the nature of the Church"⁹. The Vatican II in the first chapter of *Lumen gentium*, "The Mystery of the Church" declares that the Church, to which the four identity marks: one, holy, catholic and apostolic belong as her very nature of existence, is a historical fact¹⁰, whose origin is to be traced in the blessed Trinity. In the Constitution, before dealing with the historical foundational actions of Christ, the Council considers the Church in her eternal foundation, which is the saving plan conceived by the Father within the Holy Trinity. The ground and the goal of the earthly Church are to achieve the communion of life with the blessed Trinity, since she is the instrument and sign of communion with God and of unity among all men¹¹. In other words, we can say that the Church is the promising medium for this perfect communion because in her God wants that "all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one" (*LG* 13/1). To achieve this goal the Church is given the gift of catholicity. The first paragraph of *Lumen gentium* 13 speaks about the Trinitarian foundation of catholicity which is perceptible primarily in the universal salvific will of the Father.

⁸ Cf. G. PHILIPS, *L'Église et son mystère au II^e Concile du Vatican: histoire, texte et commentaire de la Constitution Lumen gentium*, tome 1, Desclée, Paris 1967, 127.

⁹ J. MARKEY, *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitution of the Church*, New City Press, Hyde Park 2003, 58.

¹⁰ Cf. *LG* 8.

¹¹ Cf. *LG* 1-4.

1.1. The Father's Design Regarding the Salvation of All

The universal dimension of the economy of salvation is depicted by the Council's words, "All men are called to belong to the new people of God" (LG 13/1). The Council has previously declared that, "All the just, from Adam and 'from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect', will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church" (LG 2). This all embracing nature of God's salvation, or the salvation offered to all from Abel to the last of the elect, illustrates the universality of God's salvific will. Writes E. Schillebeeckx, "The Church is nothing other and nothing less than the revelation or epiphany and the completion of God's plan of salvation in the world and in the history of the world in which God, through the Church, visibly completes the history of salvation"¹².

This salvific plan of God has a unity. We can distinguish different phases of it in the human history. God did not abandon his people when they had fallen in Adam¹³; instead he wanted to lift them up from the broken unity. He willed to save the humanity making them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. This process of re-unification of

his children is actualized through the covenants he made with the Old Testament people and it reached its fullness in Jesus Christ, which is continued in the Church, the new people of God¹⁴. The relationship that the Church has with the Israel throws light to the universality of the mysterious salvific project of God¹⁵. The Church is a means to unite the humanity in God.

Lumen gentium declares that, "This people is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages" (13/1). The mandate given to the Church is to become a unique people of God, embracing all the races and the cultures. God wants that his sons spread out everywhere must be reunited as a unique people. This insistence of the Council on the universally operative will of God to save all by means of the Church is the basis of her catholicity. It is depicted in the Constitution later on when it speaks about how each and every person is united or oriented to the Church¹⁶.

1.2. The Catholicity of Christ

The will of the Father to save the whole humanity finds its accomplishment in the incarnation of the Son of God, "for it is in him that it pleased the Father to restore all things" (LG 3). The Council expresses the role of the Son in one sentence.

¹² E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Mission of the Church*, The Seabury Press, New York 1973, 45.

¹³ Cf. LG 2.

¹⁴ Cf. LG 9/1.

¹⁵ Cf. L. SARTORI, *La "Lumen gentium": traccia di studio*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova 2003², 47.

¹⁶ Cf. LG 14-16.

"It was for this purpose that God sent his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, that he might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of the sons of God" (LG 13/1).

Jesus Christ is indeed, in nature and is constituted universal principle of salvation. Y. Congar remarks that, "Salvation is not simply a *saving* from the lost situation; it is the accomplishment of the creature to that for which it has been created, the perfecting of that to which it hopes for, even if it is unable to make it by its own capacity"¹⁷. And the Word is made Flesh to "gather into one the dispersed children of God" (Jn 11:52). So his mission is absolutely universal.

In and through Jesus Christ, God is engaged definitively to obtain the totality of humanity and of the world. This process which has its fulfilment in eschatology is already begun and is definitively taken up by Christ. St Paul writes that, "He [God] has put all things under his [Jesus'] feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22-23). Here we find the connection between the 'fullness' of Christ and the 'fullness' of the Church, calling to mind that fullness is a mode of expressing catholicity. Writes F. Sullivan, "The Church as the body of Christ

through whom God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, cannot fail to offer this reconciliation to the people of all races and culture; as the 'fullness' of him who fills all things, it cannot lack anything to the plenitude of grace and truth which God has chosen should come through Christ to all of humanity"¹⁸.

God has put forth in Christ fullness of energies through which the world can re-become a world of the Father. So Christ, filled with God's energy is for the entire humanity, for the entire cosmos, a principle of successful existence according to God's plan; natural and supernatural. Therefore the catholicity of Christ means his role of being the unique mediator between God and men, who gave himself as a ransom for all¹⁹. Y. Congar states that, "Owing to his fullness of grace, because of his kingly and priestly power, on account of his quality of being the new Adam and head, Christ is the foundation of catholicity"²⁰.

So, for the Church, catholicity is her participation in the dynamic potency that Christ, full of divine fullness, can exercise on the entire humanity and the world, to recapitulate them and bring them to fullness. Accordingly at the centre of God's plan there is the mission of the Son, to whom the Church is indissolubly joined, and at the centre of Christ's mission there

¹⁷ Y. CONGAR, *Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche*, 488.

¹⁸ F. SULLIVAN, *The Church We Believe In*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, 1988, 92.

¹⁹ Cf. 1 Tim 2:5; Eph 1:22-23; Jn 1:14, 17; Col 1:19-20.

²⁰ Y. CONGAR, *Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche*, 490.

is his Passover mystery. This mystery is not simply an event of the past but is made present in the memorial of Eucharist. And we are integrated to Christ's Mystery by the work of the Holy Spirit.

1.3. The Holy Spirit as Source of Catholicity

G. Philips in his commentary on *Lumen gentium* recalls that it is impossible to expound the accomplishment of the opera of Christ without mentioning the mission of Holy Spirit²¹. In the Council's teachings on catholicity the role of Holy Spirit is depicted as a continuation of that of the Son. We read, "This, too, is why God sent the Spirit of his Son, the Lord and Giver of Life. The Spirit, for the Church and for each and every believer, the principle of their union and unity in the teaching of the apostles and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42)" (LG 13/1).

During all his messianic activity Jesus preached about the kingdom of God and prepared for the time of "the Church"²². Looking to the future Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has

come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Council teaches that, "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth (cf. Jn 17:4) was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and that, consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father" (LG 4).

Thus the Pentecost day initiated the mission of the Church, which was established for all the people²³. The Church, who started her mission on the day of Pentecost by the work of the Holy Spirit, was immediately presented to the world. J. Ratzinger observes that the Fathers of the Church rightly interpreted the miracle of the tongues on the day of Pentecost as an anticipation of *catholica* – the Church from the very instance of its birth is oriented to *kath'holon* – which embraces the entire universe²⁴. It is not a closed community, but an open one, a community open to all the nations "even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Guillou

²¹ Cf. G. PHILIPS, *L'Église et son mystère*, 88.

²² Cf. LG 5/1. Later the Council in LG 13/2 declares that, "The Church or people of God establishes this kingdom".

²³ Cf. AG 4.

²⁴ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *The Ecclesiology of the Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium*, in J. F. THORNTON – S. B. VARENNE (eds.), *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, HarperCollings e-books, New York 2007, 93.

writes, "The Church proceeds from the eternal plan of the Father, from the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and is meant for the whole of the human race"²⁵.

The first section of *Lumen gentium* 13 concludes by mentioning Holy Spirit as the unique one 'who brings together the whole Church in communion'. The Council declares the Holy Spirit as the principle of communion who binds together the faithful in the unique Church of Christ²⁶. Catholicity is unity in diversity. We read in *Lumen gentium* 4 that, "[The Holy Spirit] both equips and directs the Church with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with his fruits". It is the same Holy Spirit who provides the rich

variety of gifts²⁷ and at the same time assumes the plurality of the subjects in the bond of communion for the good of the entire body. Y. Congar affirms that, "In Holy Spirit catholicity assumes particularities without destroying them"²⁸.

It is to the Holy Spirit that the source of catholicity from below meets and joins with the source of catholicity from above²⁹. So with W. Henn we can say that, "The third part of the creed, which professes the Holy Spirit as the Lord and giver of life, immediately proceeds to attribute to the Church the adjectives 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. These qualities result from the life given by the Spirit to the Church"³⁰.

²⁵ M.-J. GUILLOU, *History of Ecclesiology*, in K. RAHNER (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Crossroad, New York 1982, 206.

²⁶ Cf. LG 13/2.

²⁷ Cf. LG 12/2.

²⁸ Y. CONGAR, *Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche*, 490.

²⁹ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche*, 491.

³⁰ W. HENN, *The Church: The People of God*, Burns & Oates, London 2004, 149.

News

1. A meeting of the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was held at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, Cochin, from 22-27 August 2011. The Synod deliberated on various pastoral and social issues that challenge the Church today. It evaluated the functioning of various commissions. Two new commissions were constituted. They are the Finance Commission and the Commission for the Coordination of the Services of the Religious. Bishop Mar Mathew Arackal and Bishop Mar Jose Porunnedom were appointed Chairmen of the respective Commissions.

2. The 275th birthday of Paremakal Thoma Kathanar, the author of Varthamnapusthakam, one of the first travelogues in Indian languages, which elaborates the ecumenical efforts of Mar Kariattil, was celebrated at Ramapuram, Palai with a symposium on 10 September 2011. On that occasion a new book on the scriptural influence on Varthamanapusthakam by Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel and Fr. Joseph Puthukulangara was released.

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